

THE
ORIGINAL
OF THE
MINIATURE.

A NOVEL.

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OF THE
MINIATURE.

A Novel.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY SELINA DAVENPORT,

*AUTHOR OF THE HYPOCRITE, OR MODERN JANUS, THE SONS OF
THE VISCOUNT AND DAUGHTERS OF THE EARL, DONALD
MONTEITH, &c. &c.*

“ Too faithful heart! thou never canst retrieve
Thy wither'd hopes: conceal the cruel pain;
O'er thy lost treasure still in silence grieve,
But never to the unfeeling ear complain:
From fruitless struggles dearly bought refrain;
Submit at once—the bitter task resign,
Nor watch and fan th'expiring flame in vain.”

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THE

Original of the Miniature.

CHAPTER I.

EVER since the departure of Virginia from Meredith's cottage, Alicia Glendore had kept up a regular correspondence with Mr. Herbert. Her letters were always received with pleasure, and answered with a readiness which still flattered her with the hopes of possessing more than a common share of his attention. Endowed with a mind strongly gifted by nature, and enriched by art with more knowledge than generally falls to the lot of a female, joined

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to a person strikingly elegant, Alicia had actually gained more power over Herbert than he was himself aware of. What contributed to strengthen her influence, and to add to the charm of her style, was the affection which she still pretended to feel for her once-idolized Virginia. To the ear and eye of Herbert that name was sanctified; it made sacred the paper on which it was written; and Alicia Glendore, who never failed to make many inquiries after the *friend of her heart*, little imagined that those very inquiries alone were the certain passport to his affection.

Deluded by the supposition that it yet was possible to attach him to herself, could she but convince him that Virginia was unworthy of the high opinion which he avowed for her, Alicia longed to be in London, where she could be a spy on the actions of Virginia, and where, if necessary, she could procure an able assistant to forward, as well as to execute

execute her secret plans. From Dorinda she expected no succour; she was too proud, too self-willed, and indeed too noble, to become a private enemy, even to those she hated. She never gave herself the trouble to disguise her sentiments, or to conceal her dislike: her soul would have disdained to stoop to any dissimulation, had the preservation of her own happiness been at stake. She loved Alicia warmly, and wished to see her the wife of her brother, as it would more firmly cement their friendship; yet to obtain this cherished wish, Dorinda would not have yielded to any plan which candour and sincerity did not sanction. She listened to, and she believed the invidious reports of Alicia, against the character of Virginia; she felt a proud sentiment of displeasure at her avowed artifice and assumed openness of behaviour, as she remembered that by this display of innocency, she had insensibly gained the hearts of Mrs. Her-

bert and of Arthur, and she determined to mark her sense of disapprobation by a steady coldness of conduct, which would check at once every approach towards intimacy on the part of lady Virginia Sedley.

In bestowing her hand, and a fortune of nearly fifty thousand pounds, upon the son of Mr. Glendore, Dorinda had consulted alone her own taste and feelings: she had sense enough to know that her temper had its imperfections, and that few dispositions would suit with hers: she saw the unbounded sway that the family of Reuben had over him, and concluded that as a wife she should possess the same. From Alicia she had no concealments: mentioning one morning, in sport, her intention to elope as soon as she had determined to marry, that she might avoid all the useless ceremony of a public wedding, her friend duly reported it to her mother and to Reuben. Their united persuasion and
advice,

advice, their tenderness for his future welfare, decided the wavering mind of young Glendore; he gave one sigh to the memory of Virginia, and followed his sister to the apartment of Miss Herbert. Half an hour was sufficient to fix the future destiny of Reuben; and the next day he conveyed the wealthy and enamoured fair one to the north.

The return of the fugitives was hailed with every demonstration of joy by the Glendores, and the letters of Mrs. Herbert and Arthur were immediately presented to the new-married pair. Their contents brought a momentary blush to the cheeks of Dorinda, while the affectionate and grateful heart of Reuben felt a pang, which was only dissipated by the smiles and caresses of his sisters. It was not, however, the intention of Dorinda, that the family of her husband should continue to use their accustomed influence over him. She was perfectly aware of the real character of Mrs. Glen-

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dore,

dore, and of the devotion she uniformly paid to wealth, no matter who was its possessor; and she heard with satisfaction of their proposed journey to Bath; hoping, before their return, to have done away completely the force of that power which they had hitherto exerted over the mind of Reuben.

Through the medium of a friend, Mrs. Glendore had procured for them a house for the season, which, unknown to the party who was to inhabit it, was opposite to that of lord de Morville, in St. James's Place. It was here that Dorinda, with the assistance of Alicia, whose superior taste she willingly acknowledged, meant to vie with her noble neighbours in the splendour of her entertainments, and the costliness of her equipages. It is true that she consulted her husband on every subject which she deemed important; to which he always returned an answer consonant to her wishes. Dorinda, therefore, believed that

that she had secured to herself the man, of all others calculated to make her happy; and she set off for London in high spirits, under an idea that it was next to an impossibility he should ever be otherwise than obedient to her wishes, and passive to her will.

Mrs. Herbert received her daughter with open arms. She pressed her tenderly to her bosom, and though a tear unbidden fell on her face, yet Dorinda had no cause to complain of her reception. Reuben looked confused, but Mrs. Herbert's sweetness of manners soon made him at ease with himself. She embraced him affectionately, assuring him of her entire approbation of her daughter's choice; and complimented him by saying, that she sincerely believed that he was more calculated than almost any other man to render her happy. In this opinion she was seconded by Arthur, who, after kissing his sister, congratulated her on her *good* fortune,

tune, in gaining the heart of so worthy a fellow as his friend Reuben. Every individual of the Glendore family, who had accompanied the young couple to witness their reception from Mrs. Herbert, were delighted by the flattering kindness of this interesting woman, who appeared anxious to impress on all present her entire satisfaction of the disposal of Dorinda. She entreated that they would remain and dine with her, as she had purposely invited some old friends to meet them.

In a few minutes lord de Morville, his sister, Mrs. Meredith, and Winifred, made their appearance. Mrs. Reuben Glendore had intended to adopt towards him the air of distant civility ; but her resolution vanished as he approached her ; and in less than a quarter of an hour she found herself discoursing with him, with all her accustomed ease and friendliness. It seemed to her to be impossible to hear the tones of his voice,
and

and yet preserve the distance of a common acquaintance.

Virginia had suffered herself to be guided in the choice of her attire for the day by the taste of Winifred, who felt desirous that her lovely friend should re-appear before her rival with all her native beauty. With studied grace she braided the rich tresses of her hair, and disposed the lace which concealed the palpitating bosom of Virginia. She advised her to heighten her natural colour by the aid of rouge, lest her cheek should grow pale on once more beholding her former lover.

“No!” cried Virginia, indignantly; “no, my dear Winifred, I will not have recourse to art until Nature’s bloom is faded, either by sickness or dissipation. Besides, why should I turn pale at the sight of Mr. Glendore? he is no longer capable of influencing my ætions. I am not so weak as you imagine. Will not Alicia be present? and has not Her-

bert the most right to claim my attention and gratitude? What would he think of me, were he to see me call in the aid of paint to improve my good looks?"

The first person who met the eyes of Virginia was Herbert. He handed her from the carriage, and led her to the arms of Marian; then softly reminded her who was present. Virginia in a moment was collected. She hastened to the couch on which Dorinda, with her husband and lord de Morville, was sitting, and with a firm voice and unembarrassed air, uttered the customary congratulations on the occasion. Winifred's eyes sparkled with exultation at this proof of self-command, while Alicia and her mother cast a look at each other, which well betrayed to the observant Winifred their surprise at the steady deportment of Virginia, who, as soon as she had freed herself from the inquiries of Miss Glendore, hurried back to the seat of her beloved Marian.

The

The pale and emaciated looks of this sweet uncomplaining girl filled the heart of Virginia with melancholy forebodings. She even fancied that the tones of her voice were fainter than usual, and felt her own grow weaker as she listened to those of the gentle Marian. Conscious, however, that this was no time for yielding to despondency, she exerted herself to the utmost to call forth the languid spirits of her enfeebled friend, recounting to her all those innocent scenes of their youth on which both used to dwell with romantic fondness, in their hours of uninterrupted confidence.

Languid as well from fatigue as from illness, Marian nevertheless gradually recovered a portion of her wonted cheerfulness. The day passed away agreeably to all parties, and in the evening Mrs. Herbert, who wished to surprise the early friends of Virginia, proposed that she should entertain them on the

harp. Her young pupil, encouraged by her look, as well as by the desire to gratify the fraternal pride of lord de Morville, readily obeyed; while Alicia, doubly mortified at her own want of knowledge of a science which evidently captivated the senses of Herbert, sat an unwilling listener to the performance of her once-admired Virginia. All present, however, expressed their surprise at the rapid progress of her ladyship, and Mrs. Reuben Glendore coldly observed, that, if she persevered, she would certainly become mistress of the art.

“ I have the honour to be lady Virginia’s instructress,” said Mrs. Herbert, proudly, “ and think I may venture to pledge myself for her steady attention to the science in which she promises to excel. To-morrow, however, I am engaged to dine with lord de Morville. He has procured for me a treat which I could not well decline. I am to be introduced

roduced to lady Deterville, who, I understand, is one of the first of our fashionable performers on the harp."

"I thought, my dear mother, that you intended to relinquish all company. I am rejoiced to find that his lordship has sufficient influence with you to make you break your resolution."

"In this instance I have swerved from my purpose," replied Mrs. Herbert; "but my curiosity once gratified, my determination is the same."

"May I hope, my dear sir," said his lordship to Reuben, "that you and Mrs. Glendore will honour me with your company to-morrow? I shall be disappointed if you refuse me this opportunity of shewing you what lady Deterville is in private life. She is already the friend of my sister; and it is therefore my earnest wish that you should make one of a family party, and judge for yourself how little the rumours of the world are to be depended on."

Reuben

Reuben hesitated; he heard that his mother and sisters had accepted the invitation of his lordship, yet he felt unwilling to introduce his wife to so gay a woman as the countess. Dorinda, however, expressed a wish to see her ladyship; Alicia seconded it; and Reuben, as usual, suffered himself to be guided by their inclinations; determining, however, should his opinion remain the same, to prohibit his wife from visiting one whose dissipation and extravagance but ill accorded with his ideas of what a virtuous woman ought to be.

Alicia, who had found abundance of matter to occupy the attention of Herbert, inquired, with seeming carelessness, if he had yet seen lady Deterville. He replied in the affirmative.

“What do you think of her?” said she, eagerly.

“That she is too young and too lovely, not to find many enemies among her own sex. She appears to want nothing

thing but the counsel of a real friend, who, fearless of offending, would, by gently reminding her of her danger, restrain her extravagance, wean her from her love of dissipation, and render her the most amiable, as she is one of the most lovely of women."

"You seem to have studied well, Mr. Herbert, the character of the countess. If you could learn so much in the short space of a night, how necessary it is for us to be on our guard before so penetrating an observer! I tremble for myself."

"You have nothing to fear," replied Herbert, with gallantry. "I almost wish that lady Deterville had such a faithful friend as yourself, to point out to her the necessity of being less open in her sentiments, and more reserved in her actions. You will probably see lady Elizabeth Lester, who appears to be the sworn friend of the countess. It may seem rather ungracious in me to say,
that

that I do not think her ladyship, who is some years older than the countess, and who good-naturedly strove to contribute to my amusement, a proper companion for lady Deterville. This, my dear Alicia, I say to you in confidence. Lady Elizabeth is a fine woman, apparently about five-and-twenty; she has been a widow nearly eighteen months; her fortune is large and her person handsome; but I dislike the freedom of her dress, the boldness of her look, and the levity of her conversation."

"Ah," cried Alicia, fearfully, "how little, my dear friend, did I imagine, that with one of the best-natured physiognomies in the world, you were so severe a censor with respect to dress! Let me endeavour to excuse those of my own sex, who, from being obliged to mix with the fashionable part of society, are compelled to conform in some degree to its customs and habits."

"But not its vices," replied Herbert, gravely.

gravely. "I am no cynic, Alicia, and perhaps ought rather to be grateful to my fair countrywomen for the liberal display of their beauties; but it would cost me a severe pang, were I to behold a sister or a friend arrayed in the present costume. The delicacy of the female mind cannot be preserved, if it allows fashion to usurp the place of modesty."

"You are right," said Alicia, inwardly exulting at the decorum which she had always observed before Herbert: "but, my dear friend, I cannot drop the subject without assuring you that I know intimately several young women, whose purity of morals and delicacy of sentiment no one has ever called in question, and yet they slavishly follow the fashion of the times."

Arthur smiled doubtingly—"I admire that generosity which prompts you to excuse a fault you would not yourself commit, Alicia. Believe me, if the friends

friends whom you are so anxious to vindicate knew but half the remarks which are made on them by their male acquaintance, they would, if they had any decency left, change their dress for the opposite extreme, and leave to the vivid imagination of man to trace out those beauties of form which are now exposed with equal shamelessness to the footman and his master."

"You are rigid, but I dare not say unjust," exclaimed Alicia, a thought suddenly darting across her mind. "But what, my dear friend, if Virginia, in whose fate you are so strongly interested, should, like the rest of our fashionable young women, fall into that error which you deem a deadly sin?"

"I should *feel* more than I can express were such to be the case; but I am confident that want of delicacy will not be among the failings of lady Virginia Sedley."

Alicia sighed, and casting a look at Herbert,

Herbert, which implied a difference of opinion, rose from her seat. He caught her unreluctant hand—"Amiable Alicia, your sigh betrayed the tenderness of your heart. You still love your early favourite with unabated fondness. Why do you check your feelings, my sweet friend? Why do you not, at this critical moment, when she is about to be initiated into the gaieties of London, step forth as her guardian genius, direct her actions, and model her conduct from your own?"

Alicia felt the force of the compliment conveyed in the words of Herbert, but the honey of his tongue was mingled with gall. It was for Virginia that he pleaded—for her that his whole frame trembled with affectionate solicitude. A tear of bitterness started into her eyes. "I will endeavour to execute your wishes," said she, "but I fear the attempt will be vain. Virginia hates con-
troul,

troul, and cannot easily be brought to forgive the readiness with which we all expressed our happiness at the marriage of my brother." Saying this, she left him to put whatever construction he might think proper upon what she had uttered.

Herbert had a high opinion of the veracity of Alicia; he thought she was sometimes mistaken, but never supposed her capable of breathing an untruth, especially where the character of an individual was concerned. He esteemed her warmly, and thought few women her equal. His admiration of her mind bordered on reverence, which, independent of his affection for the original of the miniature, would have put to flight the softer feelings of a lover. Alicia had carefully studied his taste, and had purposely conformed to his maxims; he therefore thought her a model of propriety for her own sex to copy from,

and

and sincerely lamented the coldness which evidently subsisted between Virginia and her once-loved companion.

The hint thrown out by Alicia penetrated into the heart of Herbert. Had then Virginia been seriously attached to Reuben, or was it only that species of tenderness which must naturally exist between two persons of different sexes, brought up almost under the same roof with each other? He was inclined to believe the latter. Had Glendore loved Virginia, he would not so easily have entered into an engagement which separated them for ever; neither could she, supposing that the affection was on her side, preserve so much composure, on meeting him once more as the husband of another. Alicia must have deceived herself as to the nature of their feelings; yet, that Virginia had once been the betrothed of Reuben Glendore, was a circumstance which he would have given half his fortune to erase from his memory,

as it necessarily reminded him that the heart of Virginia must at one time have been predisposed to love the man with whom she would now occasionally associate—dangerous situation for a young, inexperienced and beautiful woman, whose vanity and high spirits had already created enemies where alone she should have met with friends! yet this lovely being, in whose welfare he took so warm a part, for whose love he would gladly have resigned his existence, what might she not be to him!

He writhed with agony, as the dreadful possibility crossed his mind, that the object of his dying father's anxiety, and of his own adoration, might be his sister.

To believe in this was to doubt the purity of an angel, for as such he regarded and venerated the countess de Morville. Again he hesitated whether he should not apply to Mr. Glendore; but he felt an unconquerable aversion to withdraw the veil that concealed the errors

errors of his father. Could not information be gained from some other quarter, sufficient to satisfy his doubts on that point? Might not his mother-in-law, who evidently was more than a common friend of the countess de Morville, be able to dispel his fears, and guarantee the innocency of his own passion for Virginia? It is true that this dearly-beloved mother had shown herself the most mysterious agitation on revisiting the castle, and evidently shunned all subjects connected with the concerns of the family; he determined nevertheless to make an appeal to her affection, and, if possible, gain from her the intelligence he so ardently desired, yet keep inviolate the dying bequest of his lamented father.

CHAPTER II.



LADY Deterville, as if conscious that this was a visit of scrutiny, had arrayed herself with tasteful elegance; and though the exquisite symmetry of her form was visible through the drapery which shaded it, yet the most cynic observer could not accuse her of having violated the rules of modesty. She and the earl, accompanied by lady Elizabeth Lester, arrived half an hour before the rest of the company; and in that time, Virginia, who already felt strongly attached to the countess, took the opportunity of describing, with artless vivacity and guileless confidence, the character of her several friends.

The heart and mind of the young
countess

countess had *once* been as pure and free from dissimulation as that of the lovely girl to whom she listened with affectionate attention. Circumstances had rendered her more watchful of others, less confiding, and, alas ! less innocent. She had, in obedience to the desire of her father, for her mother died in her infancy, bestowed her hand, but not her heart, on lord Deterville. She was sixteen, his lordship five-and-fifty. Strange infatuation ! unnatural authority ! which could sacrifice the happiness, nay, future honour, of a child to the shrine of wealth and ambition. Lord Deterville had qualities which could not fail to ensure him the respect and esteem of his wife ; but the vast difference in their age made her look up to him as a father ; to love him with the tenderness of a husband was not in her power, yet she endeavoured to act in every respect agreeably to his wishes ; and he, either from affection or prudence, or from both, gave her unli-

mitted freedom to follow her own inclinations.

It was not until lady Deterville had seen the handsome and fascinating lord de M'orville, that she discovered the extent of her own misery, and the real sensibility of her nature. It was not till she had read in his eloquent eyes the impression her beauty had made on his heart, that her own became sensible of that passion which lord Deterville alone should have kindled. Compelled, from her rank in life, to be constantly in his society, she first learned the necessity of disguising her sentiments, and next of concealing her real feelings. Love, honour, and duty, were strongly opposed to each other; she would have flown from the magic of his touch, the witchery of his look, the charm of his voice, but she dared not; yet to remain was inevitable ruin.

In this dreadful situation, with no other adviser than herself, lady Deterville's

ville's innate sense of propriety taught her to check, as much as possible, the guilty wanderings of her heart, and to hide from every eye, but that of Providence, its criminal affections. Lady Elizabeth Lester became her friend, and soon after her confidant; she laughed at her unfeigned distress, rallied her out of her self-condemnation, and at length persuaded her that no harm could arise from encouraging a *platonic affection* for lord de Morville—dangerous delusion, which has caused the ruin of many a woman who would otherwise have preserved an unsullied reputation! Lady Deterville at *first* shrunk back with horror from the guilty language of her friend; the *second* time she listened to her with tearful eyes; she talked of throwing herself at the feet of lord Deterville, and of avowing the unfortunate state of her affections, and then soliciting his consent to retire to one of his estates,

far distant from London, and from the object of her criminal admiration.

Lady Elizabeth regarded her with a look of surprise, bordering on contempt —“ Alas! my poor friend,” she cried, shrugging up her shoulders, “ and what good end is to be obtained by your singular confidence in the generosity of your husband? Do you really think that, after looking at himself in the glass, and contrasting his person with that of the young and animated de Morville, he will believe in the sincerity of your grief, or of your wish for retirement? will he not rather conceive it to have been a preconcerted scheme between yourselves, to elude the public attention? Ah! you know little of human nature, Isabella, if you imagine that the strong mind of the earl is to be lulled into fearless confidence in your virtue, by a disclosure which proves that it is at least in danger. Nay, may not the life of de Morville be endangered

dangered by your romantic candour? Be counselled by me, my dear friend; I have seen more of the world than many women twice my age, and will answer for your safety, providing that you follow my advice."

Lady Deterville, however she might feel grateful for this proof of lady Elizabeth's regard, was alone deterred from acknowledging her fault, by the hint which her ladyship had dropped respecting de Morville. She felt that she had no right to draw upon him the anger of her husband; his conduct towards herself had been marked with an attentive delicacy, which, while it betrayed his tenderness, proved also his respect for her character. He had never openly avowed his unhallowed passion; but the expression of his dark eyes when they encountered hers, and the trembling softness of his voice, discovered to her what passed within his mind. As he was likewise uniformly guarded in his behaviour

before company, and delicately fearful of giving offence whenever he found her alone, lady Deterville at length allowed herself to believe that her disclosure would only be attended with unpleasant consequences to this amiable young nobleman, and therefore gave up all idea of making a confidant of her husband, determining to act as she had hitherto done, and to avoid, if possible, all private interviews with lord de Morville.

The intention was a good one, could she but have continued to put it in force; but every thing seemed to combine against the peace of the countess. In public, and at home, lord de Morville was her constant attendant. He was a favourite of the earl, whose mind, occupied by the important affairs of his country, seldom relaxed into an inquiry of the equally-important ones of his own family. He permitted his wife to enter into all the dissipations of the metropolis; he encouraged her to give the most splendid

splendid entertainments; and thought the protection of lord de Morville, and of her brother, captain Montgomery, sufficient during his absence. Lady Elizabeth Lester, who was related by marriage to the earl, was, it is true, in general her companion; but the levity of her dress and manners were more adapted to those of a foreign court than to her own, and consequently made her a most dangerous associate to a young and lovely woman, whose feelings were always at variance with her duties.

Thus unfortunately situated with respect to the example and counsels of a friend, lady Deterville, though by nature candid and innocent, became gradually a convert to the opinions of her widowed relation, while her brother was too much engaged in trifling with lady Elizabeth to be a very narrow observer of the actions of his sister, or the looks of his enamoured friend, the gay lord de Morville. Lady Elizabeth

in public countenanced the addresses of Montgomery, while in private she listened to those of a more humble admirer.

The beauty and artless manners of Virginia, which immediately won the affections of lady Deterville, equally charmed lady Elizabeth, whose chief aim was notoriety. She cared not whether herself was the object of attraction, so as she made one of the party which occupied the public attention. The loveliness of Virginia made her resolve to become her chaperon. Accompanied by the countess, and this new star of fashion, she would enjoy once again all the luxury of public inquiry, public notice, and she therefore lavished on the unsuspecting *novice* of the *beau monde* all those engaging little courtesies, which made a due impression on the grateful heart of Virginia.

Mrs. Herbert, who was impelled by no common curiosity to break through her determination in favour of lady Deterville,

terville, regarded every movement, and listened to every sentiment with watchful attention. She saw the power that this truly-fascinating woman already possessed over Virginia, who evidently loved her next to Marian Glendore. Not a look, not a word, escaped the vigilance of Mrs. Herbert; yet nothing dropped from the beautiful lips of lady Deterville to alarm the prudence, or awaken the fears of Mrs. Herbert. The young countess preserved the most respectful silence during the eloquent speeches occasionally uttered by her husband; and whenever she addressed him, her looks and manner were such as the nicest sense of propriety would have deemed sufficiently attentive in a wife.

Even Reuben felt his prejudices weaken, as he had now an opportunity of seeing and conversing with lady Deterville in the quiet of a family-party; yet he could have wished that Dorinda would have been less hasty in courting her acquaintance.

quaintance, and that his mother also was less addicted to pay homage to wealth and rank, without considering that its possessor might be in want of every other recommendation. He heard, with considerable uneasiness, that Virginia's first introduction into life was to be at a rout given by lady Elizabeth Lester, expressly for that purpose. He remembered, but too well, the childish vanity which de Morville's sister had displayed upon a similar occasion at Meredith House; and now, under such auspices, and surrounded by a crowd of unmeaning flatterers, would not her principal failing again be called into action? would it not receive fresh incense to feed upon? would it not become incurable?

Reuben's fears betrayed to himself the interest he still took in the fate of Virginia. He had resigned her in obedience to the wishes of his mother and his two elder sisters; but he felt, upon seeing her again, that he could never be indifferent
to

to what concerned her welfare. The gravity of his ever-lively features more than once caught the glance of Dorinda, who noticed it to Alicia with some surprise. The latter smiled expressively, as she turned her eyes, first on her brother, then on Virginia. Could she but contrive to arouse the jealousy of her sister-in-law, she might raise up a powerful enemy to mar the aspiring hopes of Virginia, and to disappoint her expectation of becoming the wife of so *perfect*, so *divine* a being as Arthur Herbert.

To become acquainted with all the actions of Virginia, her secret movements, her very thoughts, if possible, was the intention of Alicia; she therefore behaved to her with great kindness through the day, and paid the most marked attention to the advances of lady Deterville, who, as well as lady Elizabeth Lester, appeared desirous to form something more than a mere visiting

connexion with the Glendore family. From them, or through their means, Alicia anticipated the completion of her plan, the end of which was eternally to separate Virginia from Herbert, yet preserve, undiminished, her own empire over his mind.

In order to conciliate as much as possible the favour of Arthur, Alicia had endeavoured once more to awaken in the breast of Virginia the affectionate feelings of her childhood; but the attempt was vain. Virginia forgave her the active part she had taken to increase her humiliation; but her high spirit would not permit her to forget that she had preferred the rich Miss Herbert for the wife of her brother, instead of the friend of her early years. Piqued by the polite civility of Virginia, Alicia's bosom swelled with resentment; yet she checked her indignation, and, with well-feigned sorrow, lamented to Arthur the repulse

pulse she had received. Herbert felt vexed; yet he attempted to excuse his favourite.

“It is as I feared,” said Alicia, artfully. “Virginia loves novelty; she has already attached herself as strongly to lady Deterville as if she had been the friend of her infancy. What can be expected from a character so light and wavering?”

“Do you think as I do,” inquired Herbert, “with regard to the young countess?”

“I will not tell you what I think, until I know more of her ladyship,” replied Alicia. “It is probable that I have now seen her in one of the most favourable lights; her person is certainly beautiful, and her dress such as to ensure your approbation.”

“She is not always so circumspect in that point,” said he, gravely.

“Ah!” cried Alicia, with a look which he understood, “you will one day be
glad

glad to recall your opinion, and wish that you had been less severe in your strictures on female decorum."

In the course of the evening Mrs. Reuben Glendore had become as perfectly familiar with lady Elizabeth Lester and lady Deterville, as if she had known them for years. She was in raptures with the performance of the latter, on the harp in particular; and no sooner learned that her musical parties were attended by many of the first amateurs of the science, than she resolved to make one of them, notwithstanding that she was perfectly aware of her husband's opinion concerning the connexion.

The next day, lady Elizabeth sent cards to her and to Alicia for a rout that day week, which was followed by an invitation from the countess of Deterville to a musical party, to both of which Dorinda determined to go, preparatory to her giving a splendid ball before the departure of Mrs. Glendore and her family
to

to Bath; of course, she felt compelled to send cards to the de Morvilles and to Mrs. Meredith and Winifred, as she could not confine her invitation to lord de Morville alone, without giving him just cause of offence, though, had it been practicable, she would fain have excused herself from any intimacy with his sister.

Mrs. Meredith began to feel some alarm at the probable expence which she should be put to on Winifred's account this winter. She saw, with vexation, the three different cards of invitation which were lying on the table; yet how was she to excuse her attendance—how to disappoint the very natural desires of a young heart, without having her good nature called in question by all parties? In this dilemma Mrs. Meredith had recourse to her own wardrobe, which, penurious as she was, could yet boast of some rich silks, most of which had been given to her, and many of which were perfectly

perfectly free from soil. Rather than purchase new, she resolved to let her niece make choice of some dresses, which, with a little contrivance, might be made to fit her according to the present fashion.

Winifred, by nature easily satisfied, instead of raising any objection to this saving plan of the old lady, expressed her thanks for her kindness; and immediately set about the arduous task of new modernizing a blue satin gown, which her aunt assured her was very becoming, and which, with her set of pearl ornaments, would shew her off to great advantage. Winifred sighed as she remembered the little use this setting off had been to her on a former occasion, and almost wished that she had never left the protection of her father, for the uncertainty of her aunt's future generosity.

Contrary to the advice of Marian's physician, Mrs. Glendore proposed remaining in town until her daughter's ball.

ball. She could not give up the delight of beholding so many noble personages assembled together at the house of her beloved Reuben, and of witnessing the magnificence which would be displayed by Dorinda on the occasion. The health of Marian would not permit her to make one at lady Elizabeth's rout; yet she hoped to be able to enjoy for an hour the musical treat at lady Deterville's, and to take a peep at the illuminated apartments of her sister-in-law. With the consent of her mother, whose head was fully occupied by the preparations for the ball, she passed a part of each morning in the society of her dear Virginia, sometimes accompanying her to receive her lesson from Mrs. Herbert, at others enjoying the luxury of talking over past scenes of girlish pleasures.

They had returned one morning from Mrs. Herbert's, who accompanied them back to St. James's Place, when the servant announced the eldest son of admiral

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ral Sedley. Lord de Morville was from home ; but Virginia, anxious to welcome his return to England, as well as to evince her regard for her cousin, hastened to meet him, and to introduce him to her friends. Captain Sedley had chosen for his profession that in which his gallant father had gained so much renown ; and, with the honest freedom of a relation, no sooner beheld the extended hand of Virginia, than he pressed her to his bosom, imprinting on her fair cheek the kiss of affectionate acknowledgment. At the sound of his voice, which partook of the magic sweetness of the de Morvilles, Marian fainted on the shoulder of Mrs. Herbert, who, in the first moment of alarm, called on Virginia for her assistance.

Captain Sedley rushed forward, and falling on one knee before the lifeless form of Marian, passionately kissed her cold hand, calling on her name in the tenderest accents. Mrs. Herbert and
Virginia,

Virginia, though greatly surprised, nevertheless comprehended immediately the scene before them. All the compassion of the former, and all the tenderness of the latter, was awakened by the discovery. Marian opened her blue eyes; a blush of pleasure tinged her cheek on beholding the attitude of her lover—on feeling the impassioned pressure of his hand.

Captain Sedley arose, and turning to Virginia, said with forced gaiety—"I little imagined that, in paying my first visit to you, my dear cousin, I should receive a double pleasure in meeting with an old friend. Miss Glendore and I were acquainted with each other about two years ago; but, unfortunately for me, I was ordered abroad, and therefore have not been able to avail myself of the kind wishes of her sister, who intended to introduce me to her family."

"I am glad that you have now the opportunity you desired," said Virginia.

"If

“ If you will remain with us to-day, you will meet Mr. and Mrs. Glendore, and your old friend Juliana, at dinner.”

To this captain Sedley joyfully consented. Lord de Morville now returned from a morning's ride, and after some conversation with his cousin, took him to another apartment to look at some pictures, of whose beauties he wished to have his opinion. Thus left alone, Marian, whose spirits were considerably agitated by the unexpected sight of Sedley, endeavoured to compose herself, that she might explain to Mrs. Herbert the cause of her emotion.

“ I know,” said she, “ my dear madam, that you will make every allowance for the weakness of a young heart like mine, increased as it is by the feebleness of my body, which has betrayed to you already my secret.”

“ My dear Marian,” replied Mrs. Herbert, in an encouraging voice, “ you have no reason to be ashamed of having formed
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ed an attachment to an object who, I dare say, is worthy of it. The family of captain Sedley is unexceptionable, and his being the cousin of your beloved Virginia must help to recommend him to your affection."

"I was perfectly ignorant of that circumstance," said Marian, "until this morning. I first became acquainted with him at Worthing, under the name of Botclar; Juliana and I were on a visit to a friend of my mother's, and during our morning rambles we saw captain Sedley. Juliana had a favourite dog, which was attacked one day by another of superior size, and but for his timely assistance, the poor little animal must inevitably have fallen a victim to the fury of its antagonist. My sister was grateful for the rescue of her dog, and, when next we saw its preserver, shewed no disinclination to renew the subject of her thanks. I cannot divine the reason
of

of captain Sedley's concealing his real name, unless——"

"Pardon me, dear Marian," cried Virginia, "for interrupting you, but I believe Botelar to be my cousin's Christian name."

"Perhaps so," continued Marian. "However that may be, he completely ingratiated himself into the favour of Juliana, who expressed an earnest desire to have an opportunity of introducing him to her family. He was suddenly called to town, in order to join his ship. My sister candidly avowed her sorrow at his departure; but I was silent; I dreaded to lift my eyes from the ground, lest I should betray the tears which filled them. The evening before he left Worthing, I saw him for a few minutes alone; he confessed to me his affection, and sued for a return. I tried in vain to conceal my feelings; to hide the extent of my tenderness, I promised to remain
single

single until he should return to claim my hand. He appeared to labour under some secret uneasiness, and was on the point of discovering, most likely, his real name and connexions, when the approach of my sister prevented him. In her presence he again renewed his oath of fidelity, and received my assurance never to listen to the voice of a lover, except that voice was his own. Most sacredly have I kept my vow, as Virginia can attest; in spite of the remonstrances of my mother, who has always chid me for encouraging a romantic passion, I have continued true to my first vows. His silence, and my uncertainty respecting him, joined to my inability to learn to what station he was sent, has considerably weakened my constitution, which was always delicate; even now, the rapture of once more beholding him, and of finding him the cousin of my Virginia, is damped by a strange foreboding, that my mother will
start

start some objection to the renewal of our intimacy."

Mrs. Herbert, as well as Virginia, used every artifice to enliven the sinking spirits of the amiable girl; but Marian's fears were verified. Mrs. Glendore was no sooner informed of the circumstance of her daughter meeting with her Worthing acquaintance, and of his family, than she declared, with great bitterness of spirit, that she would sooner see her dead than married to a relation of lady Virginia Sedley. The young man came from a bad stock, and it was not to be supposed that he had escaped the hereditary faults of his ancestors.

In vain did Mr. Glendore, in the gentlest manner, plead for the gallant lover of Marian; the obstinacy of her mother was not to be overcome, even though Alicia seconded the wishes of her father. Mrs. Glendore remained firm in her determination, and commanded her daughter to give a decided refusal

refusal to the hopes of captain Sedley. Marian was too dutiful to act contrary to the orders of her mother; she rejected the hand of her lover, in a firm but tender letter, in which she spoke of the increasing weakness of her frame with placid resignation, assuring him that, notwithstanding her obedience to her mother's wishes, she should preserve inviolate her oath of fidelity to him.

The conduct of Mrs. Glendore in this affair was not calculated to increase the esteem of lord de Morville, or efface the unfavourable impression already made on the minds of Winifred and her aunt; while Virginia, indignant at the unmerited sufferings of Marian, could scarcely act towards their author with common civility. It was in vain that Alicia protested against the unnatural harshness of her mother; her well-known influence over her parent made her veracity doubtful; and Virginia felt too severely the hopeless and dangerous situation of Marian,

rian, to conceal her real sentiments from those who, like herself, were interested in the fate of that amiable girl.

CHAPTER III.



VIRGINIA and Winifred were alone one morning when Amy entered the drawing-room with a box of artificial flowers, which she said were given her by a young woman of a most interesting appearance, who entreated her to carry them to her mistress, as it was of the utmost consequence that some of them should be immediately disposed of.—“ I wish,” said Amy, “ that your ladyship would see the young person ; she looks as if some heavy misfortune had befallen her, and perhaps your ladyship may have power to afford her consolation in her distress.”

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At the desire of Virginia, Amy flew to conduct the stranger to the drawing-room. The decent neatness of her attire and the timid modesty of her looks, instantly impressed the friends in her favour; Virginia selected several articles for herself and Winifred, which came to thirty shillings, and giving her a note for two pounds, told her to keep the change.

The young woman, who had watched with trembling anxiety the selection of the flowers as they were separately taken out of the box, now burst into tears of grateful pleasure at this unlooked-for present.

“ You seem unhappy,” said Virginia, in one of her sweetest accents; “ you look as if you had not always followed the occupation of flower-making—can I alleviate your distress? If I can, do not hesitate to confide to me the cause of your sorrow.”

“ Alas !” said the poor girl, as she
D 2 wiped

wiped away the quick-falling tears, “ when I quitted home this morning with a breaking heart, how little did I then imagine that Providence would send me into the presence of an angel like your ladyship, whose look and voice alone speak comfort to the afflicted ! But not to take up too much of your ladyship’s time, I will briefly relate the source of my apparent misery : my father, who was a clergyman of the church of England, died about three years ago, leaving my mother, in a bad state of health, to provide for the necessary wants of a large family, of which I am the eldest of nine. By the advice of a relation she came to town, and settled in a small house, where, with the assistance of myself and sister, she contrived for a short time to do tolerably well in the millinery line. Sickness and bad debts, however, soon dissipated our small stock ; my poor mother caught a violent fever in attending on two of my brothers, who at this moment

ment lie unburied for want of the money to pay the necessary dues, and too soon, I fear, my dear mother will follow them." She paused, in order to controul her feelings, and then continued—"In this dreadful extremity our landlord has threatened to seize for the rent the few remaining articles of furniture we have left, unless I can procure him five pounds by this evening; your ladyship can judge of my agony on being told that this was his fixed determination. I cast a look of horror on the lifeless bodies of my brothers, then on the emaciated form of my poor mother, who lay delirious on the only bed we have left. By her side were my three little sisters, crying bitterly at the incoherent ravings of their parent, while the eldest except myself, clung round my neck, entreating me to devise some plan to save them from inevitable ruin. For some moments I was incapable of exertion; till at length recol-

lecting this box of artificial flowers, which my sister and I had made before the illness of my poor brothers, I resolved to try if I could dispose of some of them, intending to carry part of what I gained to our landlord, and at all events bury my brothers. Heaven guided my steps to this house, where the humanity of the servants, in kindly taking in my box, assured me that I should not be disappointed in my hopes of finding in your ladyship a purchaser: I thank you a thousand times for the relief you have afforded me."

She courtesied and was retiring, when Virginia called her back—"Stay!" said she, ringing the bell, "and take some refreshment; you have interested me in your welfare; the note you have received from me is very inadequate to your wants; your unfeeling landlord must be paid the five pounds this evening; give me your address, and rely upon my word,
that

that you shall receive it in time to stop his barbarous intention; meanwhile, accept of this trifle for present use."

Virginia would have prevented her from uttering her gratitude; but the overjoyed girl threw herself before her, and clasping her knees, besought Heaven to pour down its choicest treasures on her preserving angel. Virginia, affected, begged her to rise, and at length prevailed on her to take a glass of wine and a sandwich.

On her rising to take leave, after first writing her direction, Winifred, who had listened most feelingly to her simple narrative, slipped into her hand half-a-guinea, the whole contents of her purse, saying that she would see her some other time; then, as if fearing to hear her thanks, she hurried out of the chamber, blushing at the smallness of her donation.

Virginia had, in the generosity of her heart, promised to send Miss Bateman

five pounds by four o'clock that evening. The same generous sympathy for the unfortunate had induced her to give away her last note; and as lord de Morville was gone out for the day, she knew not how to obtain the sum she had passed her word for. Mrs. Meredith was also from home; but that was of little consequence, as she was certain of a denial from her, and a sharp reprimand for her thoughtless expenditure of her allowance. Mrs. Herbert's well-known humanity afforded a prospect of relief, and to her she resolved to apply, when Mr. Reuben Glendore and his sister Alicia were announced.

"My dearest Virginia," said Alicia, "I and Reuben are going to Loeschman's, to make trial of his far-famed instrument, and wish you would accompany us; Dorinda is gone to call on lady Deterville, but will join us there."

Virginia declined going with them, but at the same time ingenuously confessed

fessed the reason which prevented her, under a hope that through the interest of Alicia something more might be done for Miss Bateman.

“ Oh ! if that is all,” cried Alicia, with an expression of countenance which Virginia did not then comprehend, “ I will not be disappointed of your company ; I have not so much money with me now, but my brother will, I am certain, be happy to become your banker, and render any application to Mrs. Herbert unnecessary.”

Reuben instantly replied, that he should feel himself honoured by lady Virginia’s allowing him to supply the place of lord de Morville, and drawing from his pocket-book several notes, requested that she would select what was necessary for her present wants.

Virginia coloured ; a sense of wrong made her hesitate to accept an obligation from a man to whom she had formerly

been affianced. She thanked him, but said that she could call on Mrs. Herbert in their way to Loeschman's.

"But you may not return in time to send the money to the poor girl," replied Alicia, artfully; "what objection can you have to borrow it from so old a friend as my brother? I am in too good a humour just now to quarrel, else, my dear Virginia, I have but too much reason to complain of the decided preference you shew towards the Herberts; however, take the money, leave your orders, and let us be gone."

Virginia reluctantly drew from the notes one for five pounds, saying that she would return it as soon as she saw her brother; then enclosing it to Miss Bateman, she, at the request of Alicia, desired her to call on her the next day, to receive directions for some fancy trimmings. This done, she gave it to the care of Amy, who was to visit the habitation

tation of the afflicted family before the appointed hour, that their minds might be relieved from the tortures of suspense.

Lord de Morville came home too late for his sister to apply to him that night ; but the next morning she ventured to follow him to his dressing-room, where she repeated to him the short history of Miss Bateman's misfortunes, and concluded by requesting him to enable her to discharge the debt which she owed to Reuben Glendore.

" You could not have asked me at a worse time, Virginia," said his lordship ; " I lost all my money last night at play, and have not a guinea in the house ; when you call this morning on Mrs. Herbert, you must ask Arthur to lend me five hundred."

Virginia both looked and felt pained at this imprudent desire of her brother ; she reminded him of the obligations they were already under to him, and begged

that he would not make her the means of increasing them.

“Nonsense!” cried his lordship, angrily; “the money I must have this very day, to discharge a debt of honour. Who can I so well apply to as the intended husband of my sister, and my own adopted brother? Shall I not return it with interest the moment I become master of my fortune? Do not be foolish, Virginia, but ask Herbert to let me have five hundred—nay, you may as well say six, for you may want some to-night at lady Elizabeth’s.”

“Oh no, no!” hastily exclaimed Virginia, “I would not touch a card for the world. Dear brother! do not let me add to your embarrassments; sooner than increase them, I would prefer returning to de Morville Castle, and forego all the boasted gaieties of London.”

“That you shall not do, Virginia; such a step would be madness, when I
expect

expect every day that Herbert will declare himself; I know he loves you fondly, though I am ignorant of what prevents his telling you so. Retire to de Morville Castle! a happy thought indeed! What would the Glendores say to so singular a movement? No, no, Virginia, this winter you must pass in town—this winter decides your fate and mine.” He paused for a moment; then gaily kissing her—“Go, my sweet girl, to our valuable friends; I am engaged to attend the countess and lady Elizabeth to their florist. You were to have accompanied us, but last night’s ill-luck makes it absolutely necessary that you should procure for me the sum I mention.”

“I am certain that I can never assume courage to ask Mr. Herbert for the money,” said Virginia, almost crying; “write a few lines to him, and I will endeavour to deliver them.”

“They *must* be delivered, Virginia;
Herbert

Herbert will give you a check : if I am not at home by four, send it to his bankers ; to-night you shall return Glendore his five pounds."

Virginia, for the first time, paid an unwilling visit to Mrs. Herbert. The necessities of her brother had imposed on herself a task painfully irksome to her feelings ; she felt the weight of the obligation already conferred on lord de Morville ; she thought of her own, and of the delicate manner in which they had been bestowed ; her vanity whispered to her that the generous conduct of Arthur was owing, in some degree, to his affection for herself. Flattering as this idea was, yet, in the present instance, it increased her reluctance to the visit. Fortunately for her, Herbert was on the point of mounting his horse when her carriage drove up. He immediately opened the door and assisted her out. The deep blush on her cheek, and her visible confusion in giving him the note
of

of her brother, made him retire to examine its contents as soon as he had conducted her to his mother.

Never had Virginia felt less inclined to attend to the pleasing instructions of Mrs. Herbert; her mind was otherwise occupied; and the re-entrance of Arthur by no means contributed to tranquillize it. She apologized to Mrs. Herbert for her want of attention, who good-naturedly observed, that it was very natural, considering that her thoughts must be occupied by the novelty of the amusement of which she was about to partake.

Virginia gladly availed herself of this friendly excuse. to postpone her lesson and to return home. Arthur took her hand to lead her down stairs; he pressed it tenderly as he put into it a letter for lord de Morville—"I shall see you to-night in *public*," said he, emphatically; "as yet I have only admired you in *private*."

The door of the carriage closed, and
Virginia

Virginia was left alone to her own meditations. She cast her eyes on the letter directed to her brother, and then on her watch; it was near four. Should his lordship be from home, he had empowered her to send the check to the bankers; of course, then, she must see the contents of the note. Her heart beat quicker, yet she knew not why. The carriage stopped, and she eagerly inquired for her brother. He was not yet returned. Virginia ran to her own apartments; with crimson cheeks she broke the seal—the envelope contained the check for six hundred, but not a line to gratify the curiosity of Virginia.

Disappointed, yet vexed at herself for being so, she dispatched a servant to Drummond's, and ringing for Amy, soon recovered her temper in listening to the happiness she had been the means of bestowing on a deserving family, who but for her assistance might perhaps have been reduced to all the horrors of despair
and

and misery. To add to their comforts she determined to mention Miss Bateman to lady Deterville, with whose tenderness of heart she was well acquainted, and to request her interest in employing the grateful girl and her sister, by which timely assistance they might be enabled to provide for their sick parent and her young family. Animated by this pleasing hope, she hastened to meet her brother, whose voice she now heard on the stairs, and to impart to him the success of his application.

Lord de Morville hugged her with delight; he was in high spirits; the rose of health bloomed on his cheek, and his dark eyes sparkled with pleasure as he counted out the notes—"Here, Virginia," he cried, "here is fifty pounds; pay Glendore to-night, if you can; I would not have you under an obligation to any man breathing, except Herbert. He I consider already yours. Be frugal,
my

my dear girl, with the remainder; I must instantly send Thomas with three hundred and sixty to sir John Freeman-tle—then, thank Heaven! that debt is cancelled.”

“And you will never play again?” said Virginia, earnestly; “oh! how I should regret parting with so large a sum as three hundred and sixty pounds, unless it was to make some deserving object happy.”

“I am not so fond of play as many men are,” replied the young lord; “but when I get into a particular set, I cannot avoid doing as they do. Glendore was with me last night; I believe, upon my soul! that he is a real good-hearted fellow; he seemed devilishly vexed at my losing so much, and offered to lend me the money; but I know not how it is, I cannot forget the conversation I had with Mrs. Meredith the same evening that I arrived at the cottage; and though
I have

I have a real regard for Reuben, yet nothing would induce me to receive a favour from one of his family."

This speech naturally excited the curiosity of Virginia, which lord de Morville hesitated not to gratify; and she consequently became acquainted with the reason of that distant politeness with which her brother had uniformly treated the chief part of the Glendore family. At first she felt mortified by the garrulity of Mrs. Meredith; but recollecting that the motive was a good one, and that in fact it had prevented too close an intimacy between the two families, she quickly dispelled the gloom from her brow, and replied with all her wonted vivacity to some observations of his lordship.

"I rejoice," said he, "from my soul that the match was broken off; highly as I esteem Reuben, yet I consider it as a family in which a woman's happiness would be very uncertain, as soon as she became

became one of its members. I except Dorinda Herbert ; her immense wealth has given to her an influence which otherwise she would not possess ; and I think my good-natured friend in a fair way of being as completely ruled by his wife as he has always been by his mother and sisters ; his genuine virtues, however, overbalance this tameness of character. But the man whom nature, affection, and circumstances seem to have destined to become your husband, Virginia, is in no danger of yielding to this weakness ; the manly spirit of Herbert would, I am confident, revolt at any appearance of undue authority, even in the woman he adored ; do you not love him the better for this confidence in his just rights ?”

“ Oh, certainly !” exclaimed Virginia, gaily, “ I would have every man master of his own actions and opinions—but be quick, brother, or you will be too late for dinner ; the bell has ceased ringing.”

Lord

Lord de Morville entered his dressing-closet, and Virginia descended to the dining-parlour.

CHAPTER IV

IT is but candid to acknowledge that as this was Virginia's first appearance among the *beau monde* of London, she took more than usual pains to decorate her person to the greatest advantage. Her brother had presented her with her mother's jewels new set, which, though they added not to the graceful symmetry of her form, certainly heightened the splendour of her appearance. I will not say that her mind was as pure as the snowy dress she wore, or the fair texture of her skin; for the seeds of vanity were too thickly sown not to taint, in some degree,

degree, its innocency. Amy could not be silent; she loved her mistress faithfully, and therefore lavished on her the praises which her beauty and the sparkling brilliancy of the many jewels which adorned her now called forth. Virginia looked on herself with secret satisfaction, yet felt an ardent desire to know the effect her charms would have on the crowd in which she was soon to mix. Her brother and the Merediths gazed on her with delight; but their admiration alone would not satisfy the heart of Virginia.

Arrived at lady Elizabeth Lester's, she was first introduced by her ladyship to a circle of her particular friends, who were no sooner informed of her rank, and of the estimation in which she was held by lady Elizabeth, than they paid to her young *élève* all the homage which her vanity required. The excessive and increasing crowd obliged lady Elizabeth to consign Virginia to the care of lady Deterville, with whom she now endeavoured

voured to make way, assisted by her brother, into another apartment. Here they fortunately procured seats.

The attention of lord de Morville was confined solely to one object, while that of his sister was attracted by the novelty of the scene before her; the variety of features and of forms, and the different dresses, gratified her gaze; while the shameful display of naked bosoms, shoulders, and arms, and the quantity of rouge worn even by the youngest of the females present, shocked the delicacy, and frequently called the blush of offended modesty into her cheeks. These were all causes of wonder to our young novice.

There were present not less than five hundred personages, among them the flower of our nobility, and two of the blood royal; yet Winifred and herself were the only young women whose persons did not display a slavish attention to the rules of fashionable attire. It is true, that

that lady Deterville had thrown over her faultless form a rich scarf of lace, but through the transparent folds might occasionally be seen her fair and beautiful bosom; her round and graceful arms were bare to the shoulder; and Virginia was on the point of expressing her fears lest she should suffer from the cold of the season, when her attention was called off by the appearance of Arthur Herbert, who had at length succeeded in forcing his way to where they were seated. The tenderness of his voice and looks recalled the thoughts of Virginia to herself; he informed that the Glendores were in the next room, and asked Virginia if she was afraid to venture to them? She smiled, and giving him her hand, told him, that although the attempt appeared to be hopeless, yet, under his protection, she would at least make an attempt to see her friends. Arthur pressed her hand affectionately; he

he glanced his eyes exultingly over her attire, and for that time, at least, the delicacy of his sentiments was satisfied.

In their way to the principal apartment, Virginia encountered the Lambtons, who expressed the warmest pleasure in meeting with her; and notwithstanding the pressure of the crowd, followed her to where the Glendores were seated. The eyes of Mrs. Glendore glanced on the beautiful person of Virginia, glittering, as it now was with diamonds, and her heart felt a malignant sensation as she saw the marked attention paid to her by Herbert and sir James Lambton; it increased as she perceived that all the young nobility flocked round the portionless beauty, and that she was evidently the object of general admiration, as well as the theme of general praise. Taking the arm of her daughter Alicia, whose feelings were in unison with those of her mother, she moved forward to speak to the honourable Mrs.

Trelawny, a lady as famous for her love of theatricals as for her indifference to *the characters of those with whom she associated.*

“ Bless me! my dear Mrs. Glendore,” cried the honourable Mrs. Trelawny, “ how rejoiced I am to see you and my divine Alicia! I have been so prodigiously engaged lately that I have not had half-an-hour to spare, or I should have called on you. Next Monday fortnight I mean to open my little theatre: I have spent a vast deal of money on the scenery and decorations, and am told that it equals, in effect, some of the foreign theatres. But who is that graceful girl who is now conversing with the countess of Deterville and lady Elizabeth Lester? I suppose she is a *protégée* of the latter, as I do not remember to have seen her before. Upon my word, she is handsome, and would be a charming acquisition to my theatre; I must get acquainted with her.”

“That

“That young girl is lady Virginia Sedley,” replied Mrs. Glendore, coldly; “*she was deserted by her father, the late earl de Morville, when an infant. He gave her to the care of Mrs. Meredith, of Meredith House, in ———shire, who brought her up as the daughter of a private gentleman. Such, indeed, we all believed her to be, until the death of the earl disclosed her real family. Her brother has, with singular generosity, taken her under his immediate protection; and, I dare say, will do his utmost endeavour to get her well married, as he has no fortune to bestow on her.*”

“Why, surely,” exclaimed Mrs. Trelawny, “she is not the Miss Sedley whom I have heard so much spoken of by my dear Alicia, and who was once expected to become the wife of Mr. Reuben Glendore?”

“The same,” said Alicia, hastily; “but change of circumstance produced also change of sentiments; and my brother

has chosen a lady of infinite merit, as well as large fortune, to whom I long to introduce you."

"Ha! ha! ha! pray excuse me, my dear Alicia; but, ha! ha! ha! I really cannot help laughing at the prudence and sagacity of my friend Reuben's choice; the rich daughter of governor Herbert was certainly a much better match than titled poverty. I have a great regard for my old favourite, however, and will wish him joy of his marriage after I have spoken to lady Elizabeth, who must introduce me to lady Virginia Sedley. I shall be horridly mortified if she has no taste for theatricals."

Both Mrs. Glendore and Alicia were *horridly mortified* at the connexion which the honourable Mrs. Trelawny was so anxious to form with their cast-off favourite; but Alicia consoled herself in the fiend-like hope, that the good she sought for might spring out of the present evil, and that Virginia, thoughtless, unsuspecting, and scorning reproof, might
be

be led to commit improprieties in her dress and manners at the parties of Mrs. Trelawny, which, by weakening the confidence and esteem of Herbert, would finally extinguish that ardent passion which, in spite of himself, was discernible in every look and movement while in the presence of his beloved Virginia.

Never, perhaps, had a woman of talent, of beauty, and accomplishments, met with so severe a humiliation as that now experienced by Alicia Glendore, in witnessing the homage which was paid to her rival, not only by the man whom of all others she preferred, but by the whole circle of nobility then present; even those of still higher birth, still nobler blood, condescended to inquire who she was, and to notice her by a gracious smile whenever they passed. Alicia believed, that to be the wife of Reuben had once been the summit of Virginia's wishes, and she determined to punish her, if possible, most severely, for daring

to raise her ambitious hopes to so high, so glorious a prize as the heart of Arthur Herbert.

Mrs. Trelawny was a character that could suit herself to any person and to any thing; she was a woman of large property, married to a man of still larger fortune than her own, and of a disposition so constitutionally even and placid, that he never opposed for an instant any of her projects. They had a family, of whom he was dotingly fond, but of whom his wife took little notice. Her time was too much occupied in pleasurable pursuits to pass much of it in the nursery. The want of maternal tenderness, however, did not prevent Mrs. Trelawny from being a desirable companion in all the fashionable parties, and she now attached herself so closely to Virginia, whom she was become so extremely solicitous to please, that the latter began to fear no opportunity would occur to enable her to return to Reuben the

the

the note she had borrowed. She caught his eye several times fixed on herself; he even spoke to her as he passed, but Virginia felt timid lest she should be seen to give what might create suspicion; and at length determined to entrust it to Alicia, who, in fact, she thought was the most proper person to deliver it to Reuben.

She had just given the note to the sister of Glendore as Herbert came up to her. "You have been so engaged," said he, "with Mrs. Trelawny, that I was unwilling to disturb your conversation. Lady Deterville commissioned me to find you; she wishes to introduce you to her brother, who is just arrived with the earl."

Virginia accompanied him to the circle in which stood the lovely young countess, lord de Morville, and her husband. Exultingly she caught the hand of Virginia, and beckoning to a gentleman by the side of lady Elizabeth Les-

ter, presented her to sir David Montgomery, her eldest brother. His sister had already prepared him to regard Virginia as something more than a common acquaintance, but she had not mentioned to him the charms of her person; she was anxious to witness the effect they would have upon his mind, and had therefore represented Virginia's qualifications as being solely mental. The star-like eyes of sir David, equal in beauty to those of his fascinating sister, immediately conveyed to her his reproaches for the sort of sacrilege she had committed, in profaning the loveliness of Virginia by reporting it falsely. But lady Deterville only smiled on her brother, though her smile expressed the secret pleasure which she felt, on seeing that her friend was formed to suit the taste of her roving brother, who appeared equally calculated to win the friendship of Virginia.

Herbert watched, with all the vigilance,

lance of real passion, every movement of this new candidate for the favour of Virginia. He saw that she was pleased with his conversation, yet he could discover no impropriety in her conduct. Sir David was brother to lady Deterville, to whom she was sincerely and tenderly attached. It was therefore only natural that she should pay more attention to him than to a mere common acquaintance. But then sir David, like his sister, was evidently formed to captivate, and might not Virginia transfer the love she bore the countess to her brother? Herbert felt uneasy from the mere supposition that such a thing was not impossible, until at length he became restless and unhappy. Sir David quitted her, and he immediately took his place. His disordered feelings impelled him to inquire of Virginia what was her opinion of sir David, and her reply was not calculated to tranquillize them. He had already borne too long

the torments of suspense, and he resolved at once to become master of his destiny. Quitting, therefore, the crowded mansion of lady Elizabeth Lester much earlier than he would otherwise have done, he returned home, and to his surprise and satisfaction, found that his mother had been busily engaged in looking over some papers, which had detained her up beyond her accustomed hour of retirement.

Mrs. Herbert testified signs of wonder at the return of her son, and tenderly asked if he was unwell, or if any thing had discomposed him? To which Arthur replied by a candid avowal of the state of his heart, and his wish to learn if the sentiments of Virginia were in his favour.

“And what, my dear Arthur, prevents your soliciting the hand of that sweet girl?” inquired Mrs. Herbert.

“Because,” said he, embarrassed, “I am fearful—that is, I am anxious to be first

first able to ascertain if Virginia is really the daughter of lord de Morville."

Mrs. Herbert became suddenly as pale as death. It was with difficulty that she had the power to ask his reason for doubting the legitimacy of Virginia's birth.

"Oh, my best-beloved mother!" cried Herbert, embracing her, "my reasons must be confined to my own bosom. You know not the agonies I have occasionally endured from this fatal uncertainty. The singular and unnatural banishment of that lovely girl from her father's presence, the mysterious manner of her education, and, above all, the unaccountable presentiments of my own mind, have conspired to strengthen my prophetic fears, that my passion would not be sanctioned by Heaven. Doating on her with the most ardent fondness, this dreadful fear has kept me silent; but I can no longer endure the horrors

of a suspense which you, my dear mother, perhaps can remove."

At any other time the ashy hue of Mrs. Herbert's countenance, and the quivering of her frame, would have filled the soul of Arthur with alarm, but he was now too deeply engrossed by the subject of his conversation to notice the visible emotion of his mother. "Your intimacy with the family of lord de Morville," said he, "your friendship for the countess, may enable you to give peace to my harassed mind. The future happiness of my life, nay, the repose of my soul, depends upon my being certain that Virginia is the daughter of the earl de Morville."

"Have you ever heard the voice of slander raised against the purity of lady de Morville's fame?" inquired Mrs. Herbert, tremblingly.

"No, dearest mother, no. Who but myself would dare to breathe a hint inimical to her innocence?"

"And

“ And is it you, my Arthur, you whom she voluntarily sought to adopt after you had been bereaved of the protection of your own mother—is it you, whom she loved with all the sincerity of maternal affection, that now, after the lapse of so many years, suspect the honour of your early friend, and believe her capable of imposing upon her husband a child of whom another was the father? Lady de Morville was guiltless of *that* crime.”

Mrs. Herbert covered her face with her handkerchief, but it could not conceal the agitation of her body, nor stifle the convulsive sob which pierced the heart of her son.

“ Forgive me, my beloved mother,” cried Arthur, throwing himself by her side, and pressing her affectionately to his breast; “ forgive me, I conjure you, the pain I have occasioned you, by doubting for a moment the virtue of our angel friend. The fault is not mine. Circumstances,

cumstances, which I am not at liberty to explain, first created in my mind a suspicion that Virginia was not the daughter of the earl. The same circumstances made me fear that, if such were the case, my passion for her would be criminal. But if she is really the daughter of lord de Morville, no guilt can attach itself to our union."

Mrs. Herbert uncovered her still-beautiful features, and fixing her tearful eyes steadily on those of her confused son, said, in a voice which seemed to dread his reply—"Whom do you believe to be the father of Virginia, if not lord de Morville?"

Herbert shrunk abashed from the penetrating glance of her fine blue eyes. He felt that she suspected his secret, but he also felt that he dared not betray it.

"You are silent, my Arthur," she continued; "something forbids your acting with your natural candour. I will not solicit your confidence, until I
have

have given you a proof of my own. The time is not far distant, yet at this moment it would be premature. Tell me, however, my son, for no child of my own could ever be more dear to my soul than you are, do you disbelieve the report of the countess's death?"

"Surely not," exclaimed Herbert, "without hesitation I have not the slightest reason to suppose the report unfounded."

"I am satisfied," replied Mrs. Herbert, recovering in some degree her firmness. "You have answered my question, my dear Arthur, and I will therefore reply to yours. Perhaps I am the only person now living who was present at the birth of lady Virginia Sedley. The most secret thoughts of her mother were made known to me. Every action of her life I was made acquainted with, and can therefore assure you most solemnly that lord de Morville was the father of your beloved Virginia."

Every

Every handsome feature in the countenance of young Herbert was immediately irradiated with pleasure. Again and again he embraced his mother.—“You have taken from my bosom a load which has frequently been too heavy for me to support,” said he, in a voice of ecstasy. “Oh, my mother! fearlessly do I confide in your assertion. The happiness I feel is great indeed; it can only be increased by the assurance of Virginia that she will become mine.”

“Let no false doubts retard the accomplishment of your wishes,” replied Mrs. Herbert, rising from her seat. “It has ever been my hope that she should find in you a husband, lover, friend, such as your father was to me. Yet had we never met”—She paused, tears again filled her eyes. Arthur looked his astonishment. Mrs. Herbert pressed his hand, and hastily retired to her own apartment.

CHAPTER V.
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THE next morning Arthur walked to St. James's Place. His heart beat quicker as he perceived the splendid equipage of sir James Lambton at the door; but it became more tranquil on beholding the countenance of its master, who, as he descended the steps, hastily bowed to Herbert, and then leapt into his carriage, with the disconcerted air of a rejected lover.

Lord de Morville was alone in his study. He seemed pleased at the sight of his friend, whose impatience made him banish all useless ceremony; and in a few words he declared his long-cherished affection for the lady Virginia.

“Your declaration, my dear Herbert,”  
said

said his lordship, “ could not have happened at a more fortunate time. I have just declined the handsome proposals of sir James Lambton, because I believed that you were secretly attached to my sister, and because, in my own mind, I had resolved that no other man should possess her. I can now with a good grace give a reason for my conduct, which otherwise would appear singular, considering that the offer of sir James Lambton was highly advantageous to a girl of no fortune.”

“ Virginia is herself a treasure,” exclaimed Herbert, with animation ; “ but, my dear friend, are you quite sure that your rejection of sir James will meet with the approbation of your lovely sister ?”

“ Perfectly so ; but, if you doubt my word, question her yourself ; she is alone in the music-room.”

Herbert instantly availed himself of this permission. By nature eloquent, he

he was now rendered still more so, by the tender, yet animated feelings of a lover; and Virginia, who had been taught to expect this avowal, received it with pleasure, but without testifying any surprise. The rapture of Herbert, on hearing the assurance of Virginia that his tenderness was necessary to her happiness, could hardly be restrained within bounds. He earnestly besought her to name an early day for the completion of his hopes; but Virginia, with captivating sweetness, firmly refused to bestow on him her hand, until their return to de Morville Castle.

“On the birthday of my dear brother,” said she, “I pledge myself to become yours. Gratitude to him who to the utmost of his power has endeavoured to make me forget the unkind neglect of my father, and affection to you, who will then have become master of my fate, will be a double inducement for me to hold that day as sacred.”

Herbert

Herbert was unwillingly consenting to what he deemed an unnecessary protraction of his bliss, when they were most unseasonably interrupted by the arrival of Alicia Glendore and Mrs. Trelawny.

“ My dear lady Virginia Sedley,” cried the latter, running up to her, and kissing her crimson cheek, “ I beg you a thousand pardons for intruding on your time ; but I was so anxious to inquire personally how you were after the fatigues of last night, that I begged of my young friend, Alicia Glendore, to accompany me. I hope lord de Morville is perfectly well, and that agreeable old lady, and her good-natured niece?” She then turned hastily round to Arthur, and apologized to him for disturbing so delightful a *tête-à-tête*. “ I know you will pardon me,” said she, “ when I tell you that my visit, however unseasonable, proceeds from my high esteem for lady Virginia. Ah, you

you lovely little rogue! I see by your blushes how things are. But I must positively have you perform at the opening of my theatre. You will make one of the sweetest Fatimas in the world, and Mr. Herbert can act the part of Selim. Oh, I have already arranged it all in my own mind, and feel confident that you will not disappoint me."

Alicia sat biting her lips, in all the anguish of envy and malice. Her heart sickened the moment she beheld Herbert alone with Virginia, whose expressive features and brilliant hazel eyes, betrayed that the subject of their conversation was love, successful love. She now awaited with dread the reply of Virginia and of Herbert. The former declared her ignorance of acting, and her fears lest she should be unable to sustain the part with any credit.

"Fear not that," said Mrs. Trelawny, exulting at the little opposition raised to her proposal. "If you will favour me  
to-



to-night with your company to Covent-Garden, you will see Blue Beard performed. I shall be happy also to accommodate lord de Morville and his guests with seats in my box ; and if Mr. Herbert will have the goodness to assist in protecting us, I shall feel myself greatly obliged to him."

Arthur, though vexed at being interrupted in his discourse with Virginia on a subject of so much importance, readily consented to escort them to the theatre. After chatting for near an hour, during which time they were joined by Mrs. Meredith and Winifred, Mrs. Trelawny and Alicia took their leave.

The kind heart of Winifred sincerely rejoiced at the intelligence which Virginia communicated to her, on the departure of young Herbert. She congratulated her on the prospect of her happiness being entrusted to an object of so much real merit as Arthur Herbert ; while Mrs. Meredith, rubbing her hands  
in

in an ecstasy of delight, almost cried for joy, that her fair charge would become mistress of a noble fortune and a splendid establishment, in spite of the malignant prediction of Mrs. Glendore, that few men would like to marry a titled beggar.

“What will Miss Alicia say when informed of the match?” exclaimed Winifred. “How will she conceal her spleen and mortification on being told that the rich and handsome Arthur Herbert has actually preferred to her the portionless sister of lord de Morville? Do, my dear Virginia, ask her to be one of your bride-maids.”

“Cruel Winifred!” replied Virginia, while her eyes sparkled from gratified vanity. “Do you wish me to kill the poor Alicia with *kindness*?” Then recollecting herself and sighing deeply, “Ah, no,” said she, “since my dearest Marian cannot perform that office for me, I do not wish any of her family to  
be

be present at my nuptials. They will be celebrated on the birthday of my brother, at de Morville Castle; and only witnessed by those who I am convinced have my welfare at heart."

Mrs. Meredith blamed her for delaying them for so long a period. "Many things may happen," cried the old lady, "within the space of two months, and I am half angry with Mr. Herbert for allowing you to have your own way, in a thing which concerns his happiness as much as your own. But here comes lord de Morville; I must ask his opinion on the subject."

His lordship, as might be expected, thought the same as Mrs. Meredith, that his sister was wrong in delaying her marriage for so long a time, unless circumstances had made such a delay advisable.

Virginia, smiling, said—"What, my dear brother, have I to fear? You surely cannot mean to pay me so bad a compliment

pliment as to suppose that Mr. Herbert, at the end of two months, will be less anxious to receive my hand than at the present moment. As for myself, I feel assured that the more I associate with him, the more dear he will become to me; but I dislike being hurried into a marriage, as if my relations were tired of me, and wished to transfer the charge of me to another as soon as possible."

"My sister," replied lord de Morville, embracing her affectionately, "you do not suppose that such is my intention, or even wish. I certainly think that your happiness will be more secure as the wife of Arthur Herbert than under my protection; but I am by no means anxious to hurry you into the marriage, though I conceive it to be highly advantageous; and had I not believed that your affections were placed on my friend, I should not even have proposed it to you."

"You take my words too seriously,"

my dear brother," replied Virginia, returning his embrace. " I simply meant that the world might imagine you were desirous of getting rid of me, while in fact I am convinced of the contrary. To be plain, however, I could wish to enjoy my liberty until the time I have mentioned. I have but just entered into the fashionable world, and should like to taste its amusements, without having all my movements directed by the voice of a husband. In two months I shall no doubt be surfeited with pleasure, and consequently more capable of becoming a steady, dutiful, and obedient wife."

" There is sense and reason, my lord, in what your sister has just uttered," said Mrs. Meredith. " I would have all young people see a little of the world before they fix for life; and if Virginia, in the space of two months, makes a good use of her time, she will, I dare say, become a prudent and economical woman, worthy of possessing the fortune  
of

of her husband, and capable of studying how she can best make use of it, for the future good of her family."

Lord de Morville and his sister could not repress a smile, at this speech of Mrs. Meredith, which the latter was on the point of answering, when the servant announced sir David Montgomery. With the easy freedom of an old acquaintance he approached Virginia, and gaily taking her hand, raised it to his lips. "I am come," said he, "lovely lady Virginia, from my sister, who is a little indisposed this morning. She wishes to see you, if you are not otherwise engaged. Will you allow me the felicity of escorting you to her house?"

Virginia replied that she was going to call on her uncle, admiral Sedley, but that as soon as she had paid that visit, she would wait on the countess. Sir David bowed gracefully as he resigned her hand, saying, "Disappointed in my first request, may I hope, lady Virginia,

that you will honour me by accepting me for a partner at Mrs. Reuben Glendore's ball?"

"You must not blame my sister, sir David," cried lord de Morville, "if she is compelled to decline your second request. I can answer for her that she is already engaged, but in the course of the evening her hand may be at liberty. She will doubtless remember the brother of lady Deterville."

Virginia's bosom again felt the powerful effects of female vanity; she could not avoid being secretly pleased at the attention of sir David Montgomery, who equally fascinating in form and manners as his sister, evidently appeared solicitous to ensure, as early as possible, her favour.

"I am an unfortunate fellow," he exclaimed, turning on Virginia his magical black eyes. "Would to Heaven that I had been so happy as to have known your ladyship sooner! As it is,  
I fear

I fear that some evil genius has only placed before my sight an angel's shadowy form, reserving the substance for another. De Morville, you have already engaged the hand of Isabella. I almost wonder that lord Deterville is not afraid to trust her so constantly to the protection of so young a man."

"His confidence is the surest guardian of his honour," replied Virginia, while the countenance of her brother bore witness to his confusion. "Surely, sir David, you would not advocate so mean a passion as that of jealousy?"

Her carriage now drove up to the door. "Hitherto I have only known it by name," said sir David, taking her hand to conduct her down stairs; "but since I have seen you, my heart tells me that, if I dared aspire to the glory of calling you its idol, I should be jealous of every footstep that approached too near the shrine of my idolatry."

Virginia's visit to her uncle was shorter



ter than usual, from having one to pay to lady Deterville. The increasing weakness of the admiral obliged him to confine himself to the house, and the affection of his niece led her to beguile by her company, as often as she could, his solitary hours. She was now most agreeably surprised by the unexpected presence of his youngest son, who had arrived the evening before, from a cruise in the Mediterranean, and who received her with all the honest kindness of his worthy father.

The extreme dejection, which was but too visible on the countenance of his brother, captain Sedley, sensibly affected Virginia, who knew the cause to proceed from his attachment to Marian Glendore. The consolation she had to bestow was slight, yet the tenderness of her voice and eyes proved to him her sympathy. He besought her to deliver to Marian a letter; it was his last attempt to shake her filial duty; and Virginia

ginia promised faithfully to convey to him immediately her reply, should she think proper to send one.

Virginia found lady Deterville slightly indisposed, yet not sufficiently so to prevent her going with Mrs. Trelawny to the theatre. That lady had called on her, after leaving lord de Morville's, and engaged her to assist in her favourite amusement. "I have agreed," said the beautiful countess, "to perform the part of Cora, in Pizarro, at the opening of Mrs. Trelawny's theatre. She has arranged the characters herself. Alicia Glendore is to be the Elvira; her brother is to personate Rolla, and sir David, Pizarro."

"But to whom has she given the part of Alonzo?" inquired Virginia.

"To lord de Morville," replied the blushing countess. "I understand that on the same evening my dear Virginia will appear as Fatima. Herbert is to be her Selim. Ah, my beloved friend,"

continued the countess, throwing one of her graceful arms round the neck of Virginia, "how deeply do I now regret the tardiness of our introduction to each other! How bitterly do I lament that my brother was not known to you before Arthur Herbert! It is true he is not so rich, but he is equally handsome—equally accomplished. I should then have had the chance, alas! the only chance now left, of calling you my sister." She sunk upon the bosom of Virginia. "My brother already loves you," continued the beautiful countess, half-raising her head, and looking full in the face of Virginia. "Must his future life be devoted to all the pangs of a hopeless passion, and must I, your dear Isabella, for ever relinquish the hope of calling you my sister?"

Virginia felt strangely affected by the words, and still more by the manner, of lady Deterville. She affectionately kissed her, for next to Marian Glendore, she

she was beloved by Virginia. “Dearest Isabella!” said the sister of de Morville, “how gratifying to my affection is the kindness of your wish! If you lament my inability to do justice to the merits of sir David Montgomery, how much more do I regret that parental authority which disposed of your hand before my brother had the happiness of knowing you! Oh, my dear friend,” continued Virginia, with an air of innocence which really corresponded with her feelings, “you are the very being formed to charm the taste of de Morville. How often have I sighed to think of the rapture which might have been his, had you not been married to lord Deterville!”

“Have you never wept at the misery which has so long been my portion,” said the countess, “in an union in which the hands alone were joined? Oh, Virginia, sister of my soul, can you imagine to yourself a being so wretched as myself?

self? Tell me, do you think it natural that I should love lord Deterville?"

Virginia's eyes met those of her inquiring friend. "He is a character," she replied, "to be esteemed—revered; he is a worthy man, and therefore deserving of your affection."

"Lord Deterville is all this, Virginia, and more. I do esteem and reverence him. I have tried to love him as a husband—I only see in him an indulgent father. I reproach myself, but I still am wretched. I fly to dissipation for relief; I court the aid of music to lull my senses to repose; I call in the aid of friendship—of religion, to remind me of my duties; but call in vain. Still to my imagination one form alone appears. My wayward heart acknowledges its master, and puts to flight all the resolutions which prudence and honour had suggested for my safety. Happy Virginia, whom no cruel father has power to sacrifice! Happy Virginia, whom the  
fates

fates have destined to taste the heaven of mutual affection—the delights of conubial love! Dear girl, in the midst of your felicity, forget not the unhappy Isabella; pity also her brother, who seems, like her, to be cut off from the possession of what is most dear to him.”

“ You distress me, Isabella,” exclaimed Virginia; “ your brother cannot have attached himself so firmly to me in the space of a few hours, but that the knowledge of my pre-engagement will be sufficient to banish my image from his mind. This morning lord de Merville sanctioned the proposals of Mr. Herbert; my own heart ratified his choice; and I am to become his wife on the natal day of my dear brother. Your presence, beloved Isabella, will increase my happiness.”

The beautiful countess wiped the tears from her magical dark eyes, and, sighing deeply, requested that her friend would hold sacred the conversation of

the morning. "To-morrow," said she, "I will call for you at eleven, to accompany me to Mrs. Trelawny's. We are to inspect her theatre, and give our opinion of its capabilities. In the evening, do not forget that it is my musical party."

Virginia staid with lady Deterville until within half an hour of that fixed for dinner. She then hurried home, fearful that she should be too late to make the necessary alteration in her dress.

At the theatre, Virginia received an unexpected pleasure in seeing Marian enter the next box with her sisters and Mrs. Reuben Glendore. In the course of the performance, she contrived to put into her hand the note of her cousin Sedley, and to entreat that she would reply to it, after duly considering its contents. The gentle Marian cast a fearful glance round the box; then slipped the billet of her lover into her bosom.

bosom. It was the only opportunity that occurred, and Virginia rejoiced that she had not lost it.

The tender assiduities of Herbert, so gratifying to the vanity, as well as to the affection, of Virginia, were too visible to the watchful eyes of Alicia, not to poison her evening's amusement. Turning from the contemplation of a passion which she had hoped none but herself would inspire, she caught a glimpse of the dark eyes of sir David Montgomery; their sparkling brilliancy was damped by the tenderness of his feelings; he seemed to dwell with ecstasy on the sound of Virginia's voice. Another motive of hatred now presented itself to the jaundiced sight of Alicia, and she could not forbear whispering to Mrs. Reuben Glendore to take notice of the conduct of Virginia, who, not satisfied with the homage of Mr. Herbert, had contrived already to attract the attention of lady Deterville's brother.

“It



“It is but natural, my dear Alicia,” said Mrs. Reuben Glendore, “that men should dangle after a handsome girl, and be pleased with the novelty of a fresh face.”

“True,” said Alicia, provoked at the *sang froid* of Dorinda; “but it is not necessary that a girl, because she is handsome, should think only of laying snares to entrap all the married, as well as the single men of her acquaintance. She positively seems bent upon forcing my brother to lay aside his reserve, as if she thought her triumph over me would not be complete, until she had given me another, and a still sadder proof of her artifice.”

“Dismiss so unworthy a suspicion from your mind,” replied Dorinda, at the same time turning her eyes hastily to the next box. Her reason disbelieved the words of Alicia, but her love for her husband made her involuntarily look towards the object of his sister’s aversion.

sion. It was the close of the third act, and unfortunately, at that moment, Reuben was leaning over Mrs. Trelawny's box. He had been conversing with its inmates, and was then returning to Virginia a smelling-bottle, which she had lent to Marian.

For the first time his wife felt a sensation of doubt, mingled with jealousy, steal into her mind, as she saw the smile of gratified affection dimple the cheek of Virginia, on taking the bottle from the hand of Reuben. She knew that the smile was occasioned by what he had uttered, but she little imagined that he had only delivered a message from Marian, who attributed the loss of her headache to the magic virtue which the salts of Virginia possessed above all others.

Dorinda endeavoured to shake off the ungenerous feeling which had embittered her evening's pleasure, but the words of Alicia and the smile of Virginia

ginia sunk deeper into her heart than she was aware. At the conclusion of the entertainment lady Deterville proposed that both parties should return, and partake of a *petit souper* at her house. To the surprise of Alicia, Dorinda declined the invitation. The latter, however, was sufficiently mortified, at hearing Reuben promise to join the party at the countess's, as soon as he had seen her and his sister home.

Unconscious of the coming storm, Reuben was preparing to re-ascend his carriage, when his wife intimated a wish to speak to him. "You are going to sup at lady Deterville's," said she, in no very conciliating voice. "I did not imagine, Mr. Glendore, that you would have gone there without me."

"My dear Dorinda," replied her husband good-naturedly, "what objection can you have to my supping at lady Deterville's, when it was yourself who formed the acquaintance? I see no reason  
son

son which prevented your going there to-night."

"I had my own reasons, sir, for refusing: perhaps I objected to part of her company."

"Perhaps you did; but as I was ignorant of that, you cannot blame me for wishing to pass an hour or two in the society of so agreeable a party."

"*Agreeable!*" repeated Dorinda, laying a strong emphasis on the word. "I fancy, Reuben, that any society would be *agreeable* in which lady Virginia Sedley made one."

"And why not? what fault have you to find with lady Virginia Sedley?"

"Are you prepared, sir, to become her advocate? after having appeared as plaintiff in the suit, you now seem inclined to take the part of defendant, and, as she is not rich, may think proper to award to her large damages, for a breach of promise of marriage."

"You surprise me, Dorinda; I had a high

high opinion of your understanding, as well as of your heart, but you have deceived me, since I find that you can condescend to be jealous of a woman whose hand I declined, from family prejudices, before I had the honour of knowing you. As a brother, I feel interested in the welfare of lady Virginia, and sincerely hope that she may prove the falsity of those opinions which some of my family still entertain against her. I am sorry, indeed, to perceive that *you* have at last become a convert to them."

Dorinda felt a little abashed at this gentle reproof of her husband; but the smile of Virginia crossed her mind. "Do you persist in going to lady Derterville's without me?"

"Certainly. Have I not promised, and would not my absence appear singular?"

"Send an excuse; my peace of mind is of more consequence than your amusement."

"I dislike

“ I dislike this folly, Dorinda. Where will it end? already have I become the laughing-stock among some of my acquaintance, for my readiness to submit to the guidance of my family. I am now become a husband, and hope to be a father; you would not surely wish it to be supposed, my dear Dorinda, that I am not yet become master of my own actions.”

It was in vain, however, that Reuben good-naturedly endeavoured to dispel the ill-humour of his wife. She persisted in her desire that he would send an excuse, but he only laughed at her obstinacy; and, upon the entrance of Alicia, caught up his hat, and running down stairs, was quickly conveyed to a mansion which was equally a stranger to connubial raptures as to connubial endearments.

From lord de Morville Reuben first learnt that Herbert had proposed himself, and that he was accepted by Virginia. The generosity of his nature led him

him to congratulate his lordship upon so desirable an event, and in his heart he hoped that the parties would be permanently happy. The momentary vexation he laboured under, from the perversity of Dorinda, soon gave place to feelings more congenial to his disposition; and he returned to his own home in high spirits, expecting to find his wife ready to receive him with her usual affection.

In this, however, he was mistaken. She had ordered a separate bed to be made for him in another apartment, and had commissioned Alicia to inform him of the same. Reuben's lively features underwent an immediate change. He was a stranger to the angry and malevolent feelings which had made his wife absent herself from his presence. Throwing himself on a couch, he sat for a few minutes, deliberating how he should act. The kindness of his heart prompted him to demand admittance, to sooth, caress,  
and

and win the haughty temper of Dorinda to forgiveness; yet a secret fear, lest this banishment was only a prelude to further acts of undue authority, restrained him. The consciousness also of having afforded her no just cause of offence, contributed to prevent his giving way to the yieldingness of his disposition. Alicia, in spite of the base and unworthy part which she was now bent on performing, loved with tenderness her brother. She saw that he was pained at the conduct of his wife, and, embracing him, advised him to go to her chamber, and endeavour to soften her resentment.

“Resentment!” repeated Reuben, in a tone of surprise. “What right has Dorinda to feel any resentment towards a man who, until this night, has even foolishly agreed to all her wishes? If the readiness with which I have adopted her opinions has taught her no better lesson than that of capricious tyranny, it is time that I should convince her that  
I am



I am not the tame obedient fool she imagines me to be, and that whoever has counselled her to separate rooms, is no friend either to her or her husband."

"You are angry, my dear Reuben. I have not been accustomed to see you so. Dorinda has had no counsellor but myself, and I made use of every argument to induce her not to act so hastily; but she has never before been thwarted, and therefore is not calculated to bear any disappointment in which she conceives her happiness concerned. Go to her, dearest brother; she will relent, I am certain, at the sound of your voice."

"No," replied Reuben, rising and taking a light; "let her have leisure for reflection. I am determined no longer to be governed like a child." Saying this he quitted his sister, who felt perfectly astonished at such an unexpected display of firmness in her brother. She softened it down, however, as much as possible, to Dorinda, who had anxiously awaited

awaited the account, secretly hoping that he would apply himself at the door of her chamber for admittance.

What then was her surprise, to hear that he had refused the advice of Alicia, and actually gone to the room which had been prepared for him! Stung to the soul at this proof of determined manliness, Dorinda felt that she had gone too far, and that she had placed herself in the disagreeable situation of asking *his* forgiveness, or else of coming to open warfare with her husband. In her heart she could not blame him for this becoming spirit, yet it pained her, nevertheless, to know that she alone had the power to excite it. Unwilling to discover to Alicia her secret vexation, she took leave of her for the night, regretting that her own perversity had banished from her presence the man whom she had selected in preference to any other, and whose sweetness of disposition, and tenderness of heart, ought to have obtained

tained from her a far different treatment.

Early next morning, Dorinda, who had passed a sleepless night, rang for her maid, to inquire if her master was up, and to desire her to inform him that she was indisposed, and requested his attendance to breakfast in her apartment. Reuben scarce waited the conclusion of the message; he flew to the chamber of his wife, and pressing her kindly to his bosom, imprinted on her cheek the sweet pledge of reconciliation.

## CHAPTER VI.

No trace of domestic inquietude was to be seen on the face of Mrs. Reuben Glendore, when she accompanied her husband and his sister to the music-party of lady Deterville; while that of Alicia assumed a pensive cast, to conceal the envy with which her heart was bursting. She had learned from her brother that Herbert was now the acknowledged lover of Virginia; and it required all her self-command, as well as cunning, to hide from the prying eyes of observation the real state of her feelings.

Virginia had dined with Mrs. Herbert; she had been pressed to her bosom with maternal fondness; she had listened to the soft and tender tones of her

voice, which dwelt with pride and affection on the endearing qualities of her son-in-law, until the young heart of his betrothed was filled with joy at the prospect of her own approaching happiness. Alicia beheld her enter, leaning on the arm of her affianced husband. They approached to where herself and Dorinda stood. The blushes on the fair cheeks of Virginia heightened the attraction of her appearance, which was aided by the modest elegance of her attire. Mrs. Reuben Glendore behaved extremely well on the occasion; she had forgotten the ungenerous suspicions of Alicia, and shook hands with her future sister-in-law, with that ready kindness which, while it delighted her brother, wounded most sensibly the tortured mind of her relation.

It had never occurred even to the intelligent and highly-polished mind of Alicia Glendore, that the constant praise which she lavished on the person of Virginia

ginia when a girl, would, by frequent repetition, sink so deep into her young heart, as to lay the foundation of that vanity and future love of admiration, which had been the chief cause of complaint against her, as she grew into womanhood. The desire of shewing off the power of her charms, of proving the truth of what had so often been repeated to herself by the sisters of Reuben, and finally, of trying the strength of his affection, had made Virginia adopt a mode of conduct at Mrs. Glendore's ball, which gave them a fair pretext to break off the match, and which had pained Reuben himself even more than he chose to acknowledge.

The same inherent love of conquest first induced our heroine to turn her thoughts on securing to herself the heart of Arthur Herbert. She had heard him described as a wonder, a perfect paragon of all earthly perfection, by Juliana and Alicia; and she quickly discovered that

he preferred her smile to all their studied attentions. Pride, ambition, and vanity, made her lend a willing ear to his conversation; but when he made known to her his cherished tenderness for her mother's memory, his veneration for whatever belonged to her, gratitude ripened into love, and the heart of Virginia throbbed with all that fervency of passion which Alicia had predicted. Notwithstanding the sincerity and tenderness of Virginia's attachment for Herbert, the inherent foible of her character was as strong as ever—perhaps more so. She had owned her affection for Arthur—had promised to be his; he could not doubt her veracity. Was she not therefore at liberty to trifle with her surrounding admirers—to listen to their elegant nonsense—smile at their studied compliments on her beauty, yet still preserve inviolate her faith to Herbert?

Virginia had now a fresh candidate for her favour, in the brother of her beloved lady

lady Deterville. A more dangerous rival to the peace of Arthur could not have presented himself than sir David Montgomery. The soft-seducing tenderness of his love-expressive black eye, and the peculiar richness of his voice, aided by a manly and dignified form, had won him the possession of many a female heart. Nature had been alike prodigal to him and to his sister; she had bestowed on each that syren sweetness of look and manner, which it was impossible to behold without feeling their magic influence; but it might be said of sir David—

“ His were the lowly bow, the adoring air,  
 The attentive eye that dwells upon the fair;  
 His the soft tone to grace a tender tale,  
 And his the flattering sighs that more prevail;  
 His the whole art of love; but all his art,  
 For kindly nature never warm’d his heart;  
 No hardy knight with wrong-redressing brand,  
 He roams on Honour’s pilgrimage the land;



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No awful champion vow'd to Virtue's aid,  
He flings his buckler o'er the trembling maid;  
No high enthusiast to his peerless love,  
He plights pure vows, and register'd above;  
Canker of innocence! he lives at ease,  
His only care his wanton self to please:  
Hymen's dear tie, for him a sordid league,  
Knit by ambition, avarice, or intrigue;  
He scorns, he tramples, and insulting bears  
To other shrines his incense and his prayers;  
There, skill'd in perfidy, he hangs to view  
A hundred fopperies passion never knew."

Although his sister had been sacrificed to preserve to him entire all the property which his misguided parent had to bestow, yet, like his friend lord de Morville, he felt that it was very inadequate to his wishes. Interest had made him do homage to the charms of lady Elizabeth Lester; but no sooner did Virginia become known to him, than he felt an emotion hitherto unknown to this general lover.

Contrary to his long-established resolution

lution never to marry any woman that did not possess a large income, sir David actually confessed to lady Deterville the singular design of making himself master of our portionless heroine, and of sinking at once into the dull, insipid character of a husband, provided that she would become his wife. The countess, in pursuance of the wishes of her brother, had questioned Virginia as to the probability of his success. Her answer terminated at once the hopes of lady Deterville, while it only inflamed the desires of her brother; and he secretly resolved, at all hazards, to attempt to win her from her fidelity to Herbert. To do this, he called in to his assistance the dangerous pleadings of his almost-irresistible black eyes. The melting softness of their expression, and the air of disappointed happiness which every feature betrayed, made, as he expected, an impression on the feeling heart of Virginia. It was in vain that she tried

to fix her attention, by joining in the harmony of the evening, or by listening to the tenderness of Herbert's voice. Her eyes wandered instinctively to those of the desponding baronet, and not to pity him, not to sympathize in a distress herself was the cause of, was impossible.

Virginia had concluded a duet on the harp with lady Deterville, which she had executed to the satisfaction of all her friends, and the delight of Herbert, when the countess requested her brother to take her seat at the piano. He obeyed, and carelessly running his fingers over the instrument, fixed his eyes expressively on the blushing face of Virginia, who, leaning on the arm of his sister, stood opposite to where he sat. With all the melancholy pathos of hopeless love, he sung the following little poem :—

“ Though in the festive circle gay,

You see me move in frolic measure,

Mark on my cheek in purple play,

The bloom of health and glow of pleasure ;

“ Yet

“ Yet think not I am free from care,  
 But think how hard it is to cover,  
 With smiles, the anguish of despair,  
 And pity an unhappy lover.”

The thrilling softness of his voice, as he repeated the last lines, pierced the soul of Virginia, while they deeply affected the feelings of his sister. She trembled, changed colour, and appeared nearly fainting. Virginia, ignorant of the cause, attributed it to sympathy for her brother's distress, and, willing to relieve it as much as lay in her power, behaved to sir David with an attentive sweetness, which was not lost upon the watchful Alicia Glendore. It immediately struck her that the passion of sir David, and the dangerous pity of Virginia, might be of use to her deep-laid plan of mining the happiness of the latter.

Herbert had placed himself between the two elder Miss Glendores during the performance of the countess and his be-

loved; his whole soul seemed absorbed by the contemplation of her he adored; while the quivering lips of Alicia thrice essayed to give utterance to her poisoned words.

“ Virginia has made astonishing progress on the harp for so short a time,” said Miss Glendore; “ but it is no wonder, when we consider who was her instructress.”

“ My mother feels great pride in her pupil,” replied Arthur, exultingly; “ Virginia does her honour: it is extremely gratifying to me in particular, who know the real affection that my mother has always felt for the object of my heart’s dearest election.”

“ True, my friend,” said Alicia, in a low, tremulous voice. “ I understand that your happiness is confided to the care of lady Virginia Sedley; may she be worthy of such a trust—may her devotion to you extinguish that fatal vanity, which rank, prosperity, and opportunity,

tunity, have of late called into action! If she is but careful to ensure your felicity, my dear friend, I shall freely forgive her all the uneasiness she has caused me and my family."

"My dear Alicia," cried Arthur, pressing her hand with friendly warmth, "I am confident you have been deceived in the character of Virginia; I shall not rest until I see you once more united in the bonds of your ancient friendship."

"I hope I *may* have been deceived," replied Alicia, looking expressively in the face of Arthur, "most fervently I hope it. I shall be the first to rejoice, and to acknowledge that I am a false prophet."

Herbert at that moment turned his head to look at his betrothed. Sir David Montgomery had concluded his song; his eyes betrayed to whom it had been addressed. The prophecy of Alicia crossed the mind of Arthur, and, for an instant, damped the rapture to which

the sight of Virginia had given rise; the uneasy sentiment was momentary. He joined her—he took her hand, and received the gentle and reciprocal pressure of his own—“ She is mine, and mine only,” thought he: “ in spite of the cold and calculating suggestions of female friendship, the heart of my Virginia is above deception—it is all my own.”

From this sweet dream of affection Herbert was aroused by the approach of Marian Glendore, who, with her mother, had just arrived. The spectral appearance of this dear and inestimable victim to parental prejudice, awakened all the sympathy of Herbert; he rose, and resigned to her his place.

“ Stay,” she cried, in a faint voice, “ stay, dear Mr. Herbert; do not let *me* separate you from my beloved Virginia; we can make room for you.” Arthur placed himself on the other side of Virginia, who flung her arm round the waist of Marian, and by a timely application  
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of eau-de-luce, revived her faint  
rits.

The attention of the company  
now engaged by a display of magi-  
science between some first-rate perfor-  
mers, and the three friends enjoyed, for  
time, the luxury of unrestrained confi-  
dence.

The gentle Marian expressed the  
sincerity of her pleasure, on hearing  
confirmed the report of Virginia's in-  
tended union. She pressed a hand of  
each to her bosom; and turning her hea-  
venly blue eyes on the watchful counte-  
nance of Herbert, said—"You cannot,  
my friend, love this dear girl too much.  
I know her nature better than she does  
herself; it demands a steady and uniform  
tenderness, a sort of conduct, even after  
marriage, which resembles that of a lover.  
A modern husband would render her  
miserable; but your heart will teach you  
best how to ensure the possession of hers.  
Be lenient to her faults, for faults she  
has,"



## FINAL OF THE MINIATURE.

ded she, with a forced smile.  
dear Mr. Herbert, your Virginia  
ts, but they are like those weeds  
spring up from the luxuriant soil  
d some choice flower; be careful that,  
exterminating them, you do not in-  
jure the plant itself: tenderness and mild  
reproof will do every thing you wish."

"I think," exclaimed Virginia, look-  
ing affectionately on Marian, and then  
on Herbert, "that a great deal of merit  
is due to me for sitting so calmly to lis-  
ten to a description of my own faults.  
You will do me the justice, dearest Ma-  
rian, to own that I never refused to hear  
either *your* advice or *your* reproof, and  
that you have always possessed over me  
more power than any other human being."

"Suffer me, my dear Virginia," said  
Marian, "to delegate that power into  
dearer hands." She paused—her voice  
trembled, and the starting tears evinced  
that a melancholy presentiment of her  
own fate at that moment crossed her  
mind.

mind. "If ever, beloved Virginia," she continued, "you should feel hurt at the counsels of our amiable Arthur, and feel inclined to exert a little of that authority which acknowledged beauty think its due, remember Marian's last advice. Yield confidingly to him who has preferred you to all the world, and thus given you the best and surest proof of the disinterestedness of his attachment. Think also of the sacrifice I have made to filial duty. If the commands of a PARENT have such weight upon my actions, let the wishes of a HUSBAND have equal influence over yours."

Again she pressed a hand of each to her heart. It was a moment of refined and melancholy tenderness, which operated alike upon all.

"My Virginia," said Marian, first breaking silence, "I will trouble you to give this to your cousin; it is my reply to his letter. I should not have ventured

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ed out to-night, but for my desire to relieve, as early as possible, his suspense."

Virginia took the note of Marian; her eyes were moist with tears. She *felt* that no hope remained for captain Sedley; she felt also that hope would be vain, for that Marian's health was too far gone to risk the consequences of entailing on herself the persecuting enmity of her mother. She took the letter; but she made no comment. The sigh that burst from her bosom conveyed to Marian the feelings of Virginia.

Arthur, willing if possible to give relief to the two friends, spoke of the approaching ball, which was to be given by his sister in the course of a few days. Marian scarce dared to hope that she should be there; yet, if practicable, she said she would attempt it, as her journey to Bath was fixed for the second day after the ball; as Mrs. Glendore had contrived to render the visits of Virginia as  
irksome

irksome as she could, and by that means to prevent her calling as often as she wished on her friend. Marian promised to look in, if only for an hour, unless prevented by increasing debility. The exertion she had now made was more than she had strength to support; and Virginia, assisted by Juliana, conveyed her to a private apartment, where she reposed herself on a couch until the carriage of Mrs. Glendore could draw up.

The head of Marian rested on the bosom of her Virginia; Juliana held her hand—"I wish, my sister," said the latter, "that you had taken my advice, and not exposed yourself to the chilling effects of the night air."

"I am better, Juliana," replied Marian, "now that I have seen Virginia, and given to her care my letter to poor Sedley. Tell him, dearest Virginia, that although my duty to my mother forbade my yielding to his wishes, and those of my own heart, yet, strong as that sense  
of

of filial duty is, it cannot banish him from my mind. While I am permitted to live, my affections are his."

"Is it indeed impossible, Juliana, to remove the unkind prejudice of your mother," inquired Virginia, anxiously, "for it can only be prejudice against myself and my family that makes her object to captain Sedley for a son?"

"Alas! Virginia," replied Miss Glendore, sighing deeply, "you cannot feel the conduct of my mother more keenly than I do. I esteem captain Sedley, and have always been his advocate; but when my mother is once resolved, not all the entreaties of her children, nor the persuasion of my dear father, can make her relinquish her determination."

"Not even the prospect of my death," said the gentle Marian. "My kind Juliana has, I know, used her utmost endeavours to soften the heart of my mother, but vain the attempt! Should my journey prove fruitless, I shall quit this world

world with few regrets, since the loss of Sedley would have made it appear to me a desert."

Mrs. Glendore and Alicia now came to inquire after Marian; the former, with Juliana, accompanied her home. Virginia's eyes were full of tears, as she saw the graceful form of her once-animated, once happy friend, now wasted to a mere shadow, leaning for support on the arm of her mother—of that mother whose unjust and cruel obstinacy had, even more than disease, contributed to hasten her lovely and amiable daughter to the grave.

"How gratifying to my feelings this display of tenderness for my sister," said the artful Alicia, pressing the soft hand of Virginia in her own; "it tells me that you have not wholly forgotten the friends of your early years; and though the novelty of your present rank in life, and the universal admiration excited by your beauty, may have smothered in  
your

your bosom the remembrance of past scenes of domestic happiness, yet there are moments when the real tenderness of your heart cannot be stifled by new connexions and new attachments. Dear Virginia!" continued Alicia, embracing her, "how sincerely do I lament the obstinacy of my mother! nay, I cannot conceal it any longer; but do not betray me if I own, that I shall ever look back with the bitterness of soul to that fatal hour which broke asunder the sweet bonds of affection by which you had been united to our family—bonds which, I vainly hoped, would one day be more strongly drawn together."

Virginia looked surprised.

"Ah! you doubt the truth of my assertion: I cannot blame you, Virginia; I confess that my pride overcame my love for you; I had looked forward with pleasure to the time when I should hail the sister of my adoption as the wife of my beloved Reuben." Virginia changed colour.

colour. "I thought that in you were centered every requisite of temper, morals, and manners, which could make my brother happy. Alas! I had fondly hoped that your wishes, Virginia, were the same as mine. When I discovered my error, resentment and wounded affection made me act contrary to my natural character, and when reflection told me that I was to blame, my pride prevented my shewing that I thought so. Your tenderness to-night has subdued me, and I now ask your forgiveness, Virginia, for that haughtiness of deportment with which I have hitherto conducted myself towards you. I hope that Reuben is happy; I hope also that you will never have cause to lament giving the preference to Mr. Herbert."

The generosity of Virginia's character immediately displayed itself. She returned the Judas kiss of Alicia, and begged that all might be mutually buried in oblivion—"Let us only remember,"



ber," said she, "our early friendship, and let it from this moment be more firmly cemented than ever. To regret the past would now indeed be useless. The happiness of your brother will, I trust, be permanent. Highly as I shall ever esteem him, yet as your mother could never at heart have loved me, I do not now lament the change in our sentiments, convinced as I am that all things are for the best, and that good frequently springs out of evil."

Alicia again embraced her unsuspicious friend—"Knowing, as you do, the unhappy failing of my mother's disposition," said she, "you will excuse me, my dear Virginia, if I behave to you as usual before her; but in her absence, I can freely give way to the natural affection of my soul. You do not now doubt me, my dear Virginia, do you?"

"Doubt you!" exclaimed Virginia, affectionately, "and why should I doubt your sincerity, my Alicia? What interest

terest could you possibly have in feigning for me a regard you did not feel?"

"True—what indeed, Virginia! But we will return to the drawing-room, where Mr. Herbert is expecting you, with all the impatience of a successful lover."

Had Virginia cast a glance at that moment towards the face of her pretended friend, the expression of envy which was then visible would have created a suspicion unfavourable to the veracity of Alicia, who secretly exulted that she once more had found the master-key to open the heart of Virginia, to become mistress of her confidence, and turn to her own advantage all the little weaknesses which, by this means, would be entrusted to her discretion and secrecy.

CHAPTER VII.  
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THOUGH the open and ingenuous mind of Virginia too readily put faith in the specious professions of Alicia Glendore, she could not persuade Winifred Meredith to think as she did. Winifred persisted in doubting the sincerity of Alicia, and Virginia in defending it. During this friendly altercation the object of it made her appearance, which was rendered doubly welcome to Virginia, as she was the bearer of a few lines from her beloved Marian. Winifred quitted the room soon after, and Alicia was thus left to pursue, unrestrained, the plan she meditated. She had that morning become mistress of a piece of information, through the means of Mrs. Reuben Glendore's

Glendore's waiting-maid, who gained it from the valet of Arthur Herbert, and she felt a malicious curiosity to behold the effect it would produce on his affianced bride.

Alicia first began by extolling the amiable character of young Herbert; it was a theme most pleasing to Virginia, who joined affectionately in his praise. In the grateful feelings of the moment, she disclosed to Alicia all those little circumstances which had contributed to strengthen her affection for Arthur; and Alicia now, for the first time, learnt the secret tie which had bound him from infancy to the family of de Morville. In dwelling with gratitude upon the attachment which he still continued to cherish for the memory of her mother, Virginia was too deeply occupied to observe the countenance of her attentive hearer. She spoke of his emotions on once more revisiting the castle of her father, and of the singularity of her meeting with an

old friend of her mother in Mrs. Herbert. In short, she concealed nothing from Alicia, who received her confessions with an air of tender interest, of sisterly concern, which completely duped the too-communicative Virginia.

“Dearest Virginia!” said Alicia, embracing her, “how I rejoice at the unreserved confidence which exists between you and Herbert! What you have mentioned to me this morning has excited a considerable degree of surprise; is it not strange that he should have been voluntarily adopted by your mother, yet rejected by your father? and what is still more strange, that Mrs. Herbert should once have been an inmate of de Morville Castle and a friend of the countess, yet incapable of giving you any information upon a subject which I know has always been of the utmost importance to you? I own that I should like to know something more of the private concerns of Arthur’s family before I became his wife;

wife; and much as I should hesitate to give Mrs. Herbert a moment's uneasiness, still I would advise you, my dear girl, to attempt at least to gain from her the reason why the miniature of your mother was displaced from its frame—why, in short, her name should have become displeasing to the ears of your father. This may enable you to form your own judgment of the justice of his conduct towards yourself.”

Alicia paused, to observe the changeful features of Virginia; the smile of happiness no longer dimpled her cheek, or played around her beautiful mouth—“Alas!” she cried, “I would give up part of my existence to be assured that my father’s prejudice against me was unfounded—to be assured that my mother died innocent of his aversion. Alicia, my early friend, my youth’s dear companion, you know with what anxiety I have always looked forward to the elucidation of this seeming mystery. I

dare not question Mrs. Herbert upon the subject; it evidently gives her pain; and there is a sanctity about her which forbids my wounding her feelings by my insatiable curiosity; yet I am convinced that she has the power to satisfy it."

"The happiness of mortals is at best uncertain," replied Alicia, "but yours is of too much value to be trifled with. I fondly hoped that that of my brother was permanently fixed by his union with Dorinda; it was a match which held out the brightest prospects of felicity; but I fear that her excessive love, on which all my hopes were built, will prove his torment."

"God forbid!" said Virginia, fervently; "the happiness of Reuben is as dear to me as my own."

"Ah, Virginia!—but it is useless to regret the past; yet I cannot help thinking that Reuben still dwells with melancholy pleasure on those happy days of our childhood, when interest and
ambition

ambition were known only to us by name, and when his chief hope was to be one day the husband of Virginia."

"No more of this, I beseech you, my dear Alicia; I dare not give credit to the suggestions of your returning love for me. Reuben is now the husband of another; I would not for the world believe that he regrets his willing obedience to the desires of his mother. He is happy—Reuben must be happy; the goodness of his heart, the sweetness of his disposition, must render any woman blessed: but why, my friend, do you suspect the durability of his domestic ease?"

"Because," replied Alicia, "Dorinda is so extremely jealous, that she cannot bear him a moment out of her sight. The night before lady Deterville's music-party, she took offence at his supping out, and actually ordered a separate chamber to be got ready against his return. * The next morning, however, Do-

rinda thought proper to make the first advances, and requested his company to breakfast in her own apartment. You could not perceive that they had quarrelled, could you, Virginia, when they arrived at lady Deterville's?"

"No," said Virginia, sighing, almost unconsciously, "it is the last thing that I should have imagined; I hope in Heaven it may never happen again."

"In disclosing to you the secrets of my sister-in-law, I prove to you, Virginia, my affection. I consider you as one of my own family, and I know that you will hold my confidence sacred. But now tell me, my dear girl, has Herbert ever betrayed any symptoms of his sister's jealous temper?"

"I have never intentionally given him cause."

"Be convinced, my dear Virginia, of this before you become irrevocably his. A jealous disposition is the one above all others calculated to make the married state

state wretched. Herbert has, of course, entrusted to you the history of the miniature which he still wears in his bosom."

Virginia felt that she looked pale—"No, indeed," she replied, "he has not. This is the first time that I have heard that he was in possession of any picture which he thought necessary to conceal from me."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Alicia, with surprise; "and is it possible that Arthur Herbert can have any secret which he has not confided to his Virginia? Do not mention my name to him, my dear friend, lest he should deem me too officious. Perhaps I may, through the medium of his sister, be able to discover what Eastern beauty has been so liberal of her favour. She may even be dead, and that may account for the religious veneration with which he guards her resemblance."

"She is most probably dead," repeated

Virginia, in a tremulous voice; "yet I am surprised that Arthur should not have mentioned her to me."

"Well, my love, do not be jealous," cried Alicia, inwardly pleased that she had at length started a subject which must naturally weaken the confidence of Virginia in the faith of Herbert; "do not be jealous, or you will be like Dorinda. I have chatted so long, that I fear she will not greet my return with a conciliatory smile." Then looking at her watch—"I did not think it had been so late. Bateman was to call at two, with some wreaths of flowers for the supper-rooms. Dorinda is determined that her first public night shall not, if possible, be eclipsed by any one this winter. She has already given orders to a considerable amount, which will, I hope, be of essential service to the poor girl and her family, as she pays for the articles as soon as she receives them, which is rather a novelty in fashionable life." So saying,
Alicia

Alicia embraced her friend, then left her to feel the malignant operation of the slow poison she had administered to the guileless heart of Virginia.

When Alicia had first learned from the attendant of Mrs. Reuben Glendore that Mr. Herbert's man had caught a glimpse of a miniature-picture which his master wore in his bosom, she hastened to Virginia, in expectation that she was in possession of the secret. Her surprise, therefore, was real on finding that she was in perfect ignorance of the circumstance. Yet she felt a degree of malignant satisfaction on perceiving that the changeful features of Virginia betrayed her uneasiness at the unpleasant discovery. To Dorinda she next applied; but here also she was unsuccessful; the sister of Herbert was unconscious of her brother having formed any attachment—"Though if he had," said she, "it is not likely that I should have been his confidant. My mother, I believe,

lieve, is the repository of all his thoughts and wishes; from her he has no secrets."

Disappointed in this second attempt at information, Alicia deemed it prudent to restrain her curiosity, and await patiently the movements of Virginia, who might be supposed to be at least as much, if not more interested than herself, in the discovery. She could not, however, refrain from mentioning the circumstance of the miniature in confidence to Reuben, who, from far different motives than those by which his sister was actuated, felt a strong and instantaneous desire to become acquainted with the name of the original of the miniature, which was thus secretly treasured by the affianced husband of Virginia.

Virginia was engaged to dine with lady Deterville on the day fixed for Mrs. Reuben Glendore's first public night; and Amy was ordered to be in readiness to attend on her young mistress, who, at the desire of the countess, was to dress at her house.

Lord

Lord Deterville was gone out of town for a fortnight, and his beautiful wife was thus left to pursue, unrestrained by his presence, the bent of her inclinations. Lady Elizabeth Lester, lord de Morville, and sir David Montgomery, were of the party. Time flew rapidly with the countess, for it was passed in the society of those she loved, and it was late before she thought of retiring to her chamber to prepare for the ball.

The dress of Virginia was a present from the countess, and made exactly like that sent home at the same time for herself; it was worthy the generous spirit of the donor, and calculated to shew off to advantage a person less lovely than that of Virginia. It was not only composed of the same costly materials as that of the young countess, but it was also made in the same excess of fashion, which gave Virginia considerable uneasiness—“What can I do, Amy?” said she; “I shall never be able to bear the gaze of
H 6 any

any eyes but my own. "I often blush for others, but now I may well blush for myself; I positively cannot go unless the countess will lend me some additional lace to conceal more of my bosom."

"The countess and lady Elizabeth now entered, and inquired the cause of their friend's visible embarrassment. It was no sooner made known than they laughed heartily at her unfashionable feelings—"Trust me," cried lady Elizabeth, "that you will not see any young woman to-night whose person will not be as much, if not more, exposed than your own, unless, indeed, she is obliged to conceal it from some defect."

"But I shall be in pain all the evening," replied Virginia, "and want courage to encounter censure, where I have only been accustomed to receive praise."

"Oh, true, my love, your prudence is commendable," said lady Elizabeth; "I think Herbert has rather singular notions for so young and handsome a man.

What

What can we do, Isabella, to save our *protégée* from the frowns of her future spouse?"

The colour deepened on the cheek of Virginia; it was not alone the frowns of Herbert which she dreaded to meet, but she had been used to the praise of Reuben, on the uniform modesty of her attire, and he was still her friend; his opinion was still of consequence; and she felt, likewise, the timid delicacy of a young beginner, who had yet to learn the bold freedom of fashionable manners.

Lady Deterville was not proof against the *mauvaise honte* of Virginia; she almost felt ashamed as her eye glanced towards the mirror which reflected the exposed beauties of her own perfect form. Yet habit had rendered the sight familiar to her, and the carmine of nature, which betrayed the quickness of her feelings, was only discernible as it heightened that of art. Good-nature and affection

tion made her feel for the uneasiness of Virginia; and she immediately sent for a lace handkerchief, which she threw over the naked shoulders of her friend.

Herbert had not seen Virginia that morning; he had been busily occupied in answering letters from India, which had detained him at home the chief part of the day. He knew of her dining with lady Deterville, and had been anxiously waiting her arrival for more than an hour, during which time Alicia had kept him in earnest conversation. He no sooner beheld her enter than he rose instinctively; love illumined his eyes and crimsoned his face; he advanced a few paces, stopped, returned, and reseated himself.

Alicia easily divined the cause; she saw Virginia, who, with lady Elizabeth Lester, was leaning on sir David Montgomery. They were speaking to Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Glendore, and were now joined by lady Deterville and lord
de

de Morville. The eyes of Alicia sparkled with delight, as she perceived that the dress of Virginia was a copy of that worn by the lovely countess; she was almost afraid to speak to Herbert, lest her voice should betray her secret exultation. At length she said—"My dear friend, will not lady Virginia think your absence singular? Had you not better remind her that you are here?"

"She is at present too much engaged," he replied, haughtily.

"My friend, you are discomposed; I know the cause, and feel too deeply your chagrin to be deceived as to its origin. Yet surely the tenderness of your heart will incline you to excuse in your Virginia a failing common to most young women; and though I once pleaded in vain for my sex's weakness, and reminded you how liable we are to err, do not let me now recur to the same subject to as little purpose. Our Virginia is young, and has most likely yielded to the persuasion

suasion and example of her favourite lady Deterville; come, my dear friend, let us join them."

Herbert again rose, but with a heavy heart; he felt himself completely mortified since Virginia had verified *one of* the predictions of Alicia, and had deviated from that delicacy of attire which, in his estimation, marked the delicacy of the mind. His countenance bespoke his unsettled feelings, and his voice trembled as he took her hand.

Alicia gloried in the self-evident weakness of Virginia, and taking an opportunity, whispered in her ear—"Now is the time to try the temper of Herbert; he is already offended at your tardiness in coming, and has betrayed some jealousy at the attentions of sir David Montgomery. Remember, my dear girl, that a suspicious lover makes a jealous husband: if I loved you less, I should not point out the failings of so dear a friend."

Virginia's

Virginia's haughty spirit took the alarm—"If he is so easily offended," thought she, "for an involuntary fault, what will he not be when the rights of a husband shall sanction the authority of a lover?"

Herbert now led her to where the dance was forming—"You are late, my dearest Virginia," said he; "what can have detained you beyond the hour you mentioned to me?"

Virginia replied with her usual candour.

"Indeed," said he, in evident displeasure, "I should not have found the time fly swiftly in *your* absence. I hope that the constancy of your affections is not to be shaken by new friendships; and you must pardon me if I decidedly disapprove of that which you have formed with lady Deterville, in preference to those of your early years."

Virginia was ill prepared to meet with reproach, and least of all from Herbert. She

She defended with energy the character of the countess, avowed her regard for her, which she said was unalterable. Her lover heard her in silence.

The dance began, but neither Virginia nor Arthur joined in it with their accustomed spirit. When it had concluded he led her to the refreshment-room; but sir David Montgomery, who followed them, prevented the wished-for conference of Herbert.

With the keenest sensations of disappointment Arthur resigned her hand to the brother of the countess, whose magic eyes made those of Virginia droop beneath their dangerous influence, as they glanced over her well-proportioned form, now rendered doubly alluring by the voluptuous dress she wore, and the natural crimson of her fair and delicate countenance.

Herbert sighed deeply as he flung himself on a couch by the side of Alicia Glendore—"You do not dance," said he,

he, pressing her hand affectionately ;
 “ perhaps the refinement of a mind like yours precludes all enjoyment in the exercise, unless your partner was one whom your heart had selected to be one for life. When I marry, my wife must give up dancing.”

“ You will do well to make that stipulation before marriage,” replied Alicia, “ for I know that Virginia is passionately fond of the amusement, and that it will cost her some sighs to give it up. My brother used frequently to rally her on her excessive love for dancing, and, in sport, would warn her that she must relinquish it when she became his wife ; but Virginia would take offence, and obstinately declare, that marriage should not fetter her inclinations, and that, in fact, she expected to enjoy more liberty after, than before that eventful ceremony.”

“ Such were the silly opinions of a child,” exclaimed Arthur, pettishly ;
 “ opinions

“opinions which she would now be ashamed to acknowledge.”

“I hope so,” said Alicia; “you can scarce be more interested in the fate of Virginia than I am; but I dislike and tremble for what may be the consequence of her close intimacy with lady Deterville. Were she a single woman I should not hesitate to say that she was affianced to lord de Morville; but she is married—my conclusion is obvious.”

Herbert became more and more uneasy; he remembered the miniature worn by his enamoured friend, and he feared for the virtue of the beautiful, but imprudent donor. He raised his eyes to where the beloved original of his treasured miniature stood; he saw the transparent handkerchief fall from her bosom as she gaily glided down the enlivening dance. He saw, it is true, that bosom and changeful face crimsoned with blushes as she extended her graceful arm, half naked to the view, towards lady Elizabeth

beth Lester, who smilingly caught up the slender covering, and tying it carelessly round her throat, refused to restore it to Virginia.

“ Sir David Montgomery is almost as handsome as his sister,” remarked Alicia Glendore; “ he is possessed of manners highly fascinating, and I am told that his understanding is equally to be admired; but I have also heard that he is by far too free in his opinions on women.”

“ Sir David is not to blame,” cried Arthur, with a bitterness quite unusual to him. “ He is a man of sense, and judges of the coin by the purity of its metal.”

“ He is a general favourite notwithstanding; and even your Virginia, my dear friend, seems pleased with having withdrawn him from his devotions to lady Elizabeth Lester.”

“ My Virginia,” said Herbert, checking a sigh, perhaps one of the most painful he had ever drawn, “ is, I perceive,
subject

subject to the weakness of her sex in general; but if she loves me, she will have betrayed it for the last time."

Herbert now moved towards the object of his solicitude, who was interceding with lady Elizabeth for the restoration of the handkerchief. At his approach her blushes deepened, and a tear had actually started into her dark eyes: Lady Elizabeth, who enjoyed not only her confusion, but the disconcerted looks of her lover, nodded to her affectionately; and passing her arm familiarly through that of sir David, walked on, to the great vexation of Virginia, who, at that moment, felt no inclination to encounter the just reproof of Herbert, much less to appear as if that reproof had power to wound her feelings.

"Are you not afraid of catching cold, lady Virginia?" inquired Herbert. "The night is sharp, and, warmed as you are by exercise, you are not sufficiently protected from the change of air as you pass through
through

through the rooms. Let me borrow a shawl from my sister."

"No, thank you," said Virginia, in a hesitating voice; "I should only be laughed at, and styled the old woman."

"And is public opinion, Virginia, when grounded on folly and indelicacy, of more value in your eyes than private affection?"

"Certainly not; but I do not apprehend that I can endanger the latter merely because I dislike to appear different from other people. Lady Elizabeth is very provoking, for not restoring to me the handkerchief."

"Lady Elizabeth has long set public opinion at defiance. The immodesty of her dress proves the licentiousness of her mind. It is not such as her ladyship, surely, whose laughter would have any power over my Virginia?"

Virginia was silent through shame; and a disinclination to own that she was not proof against the attacks of raillery, though

though they proceeded from a worthless object.

“ You are silent, my beloved,” continued Arthur. “ I see you are shocked at my sentiments respecting lady Elizabeth. She is not a fit companion for you, my dearest Virginia. Your favourite countess, whose sweetness of manners, whose beauty, and captivating grace, have taken complete possession of your heart, may *once* have been as free from censure, as innocent of blame as yourself. Nay, start not, my Virginia; bad example is contagious, and cannot fail in time to corrupt the purest mind; but a ball-room is not a fit place for serious reflections.”

“ And yet it has evidently called them forth,” replied Virginia, gaily. “ I have never before seen you in so gloomy a mood; indeed, I thought that, like myself, you were inclined to enjoy all the festivities of so animated a scene.”

“ You thought right, my sweetest Virginia; and yet to-night I am incapable

able of relishing one of my favourite amusements. I have been deeply mortified, and cannot easily recover my composure." His eyes rested on the exposed person of Virginia, who immediately comprehended his meaning.

"Will you not dance Morgiana?" inquired Virginia, who felt the enlivening strains dart through every limb, and who longed to make one in the set. To her great disappointment Arthur declared his resolution to remain only a spectator, and intimated his expectation that she would do the same. Virginia, vexed and angry at what she thought an undue trial of her temper, rose, and coldly said, that she was engaged to Reuben Glendore, in case that her hand should be at liberty. Without waiting for the reply of Herbert, she darted amidst the crowd, but the heaviness of her heart ill accorded with the lightness of her movements, and Reuben felt her tremble as he led her to the top of the set.

Notwithstanding the secret chagrin of our heroine, she danced with admirable grace. Her easy motions, and her fascinating smile, recalled to the remembrance of Glendore the days of his early youth, when, light of heart, he had trod the verdant lawn of Meredith House, and in the innocence of boyish affection, pressed his lips to those of his affianced bride. Not as then did his mild eyes catch from hers a portion of youthful fire—not as then did they wander with delight over the swelling bosom, delicately shaded even from the observation of her constant companions. Far different were the emotions which now filled the mind of Reuben, as he contemplated that fair bosom, half exposed to the gaze of admiration, and those round and polished arms uncovered nearly to the shoulder. The fair bosom, the graceful arms, the dark and brilliant eye, the tempting mouth dimpled by the seeming smile of happiness which came not *then* from the heart,

heart, whose quick pulsation was visible through the tightened vest, all conspired to agitate the soul of Glendore with feelings which ill accorded with the sanctity of the character he had so lately assumed. He had not even the presence of his wife to remind him of his duties; she was engaged in the card-room, and, unfortunately, was one of its most infatuated votaries.

Virginia had repeatedly, during the dance, glanced her eye towards the couch on which her moody lover was seated. She observed that Alicia, as usual, was by his side; but it never occurred to the unsuspecting girl that this pretended friend of her childhood was administering poison to the man to whom her childhood's friend was betrothed. It never occurred to Virginia that the changeful expression of Herbert's countenance, the sudden start of agony which he gave, was produced by any other pain than that which the body had undergone.

dergone. Fearing that he was ill, she felt glad that the conclusion of the dance enabled her to inquire after his health. She was prevented, for a moment, by a question from Winifred. She hastened to where he had been seated; but what was her mingled surprise and mortification, at learning from Alicia that he was gone home to finish some letters of importance, which were to be sent to INDIA.

The glowing cheek of Virginia turned pale; she recollected the miniature, and yielded to a sentiment of jealousy, which was unworthy of her. Unwilling to encounter the pointed raillery of Alicia, she hastened with Reuben to the card-room, where they found Dorinda deeply engaged at play. Every feature betrayed her inward vexation.

“ I have been singularly unfortunate to-night, my dear Glendore,” said she, “ and have already lost two hundred pounds. Virginia, I wish you would take my seat for a short time.”

Virginia,

Virginia, however, declined the proposal. Cards were her aversion; and though she saw the increasing gloom darken the face of Dorinda, she was firm in her determination. A lady, however, gladly accepted the vacant seat; and Mrs. Glendore hastened to pay the necessary attentions to her guests.

Had Virginia followed the impulse of her own inclinations, she would have quitted a scene, now rendered irksome to her by the singular conduct, and still more singular absence of Arthur; but she feared to excite the ridicule of lady Elizabeth, or the sympathy of the countess. Reuben was equally astonished as herself at the departure of Herbert, and feared lest it had been occasioned by some imprudence on the part of Virginia. To give relief to her thoughts, he proposed to conduct her to a private chamber, where Marian, who was too feeble to expose herself to the bustle of the crowded apartments, sat anxiously waiting.

waiting for the sound of Virginia's well-known step.

Folded to the affectionate bosom of her long-loved friend, Virginia soon forgot all uneasiness, but that which arose from the increased debility of Marian. Reuben gazed on them in expressive silence; he seemed to have forgotten the natural failing of Virginia; he only remembered that she was the beloved of his youngest sister, the friend of his boyhood, and that at least she could not rank among her faults that detestable passion of gaming, to which Dorinda was so strongly attached—"If," thought he, "the virtue of Virginia is assailable, it must be owing to the susceptibility of her heart, the confiding innocence of her nature, not to the cold and calculating necessities of a gamester. I have resigned a woman whose vanity and thoughtlessness time and tenderness may correct. I have married one whose large fortune gives her a right to dispose of it as she pleases,

pleases, and who, if not weaned from the vice of gaming, may entail more ruin on her family than the mere loss of her money.”

Reuben felt that he had done wrong in comparing his rich wife to the portionless Virginia; the comparison gave birth to feelings which caused a sigh to escape him; and he hurried back to the public apartments, eager to banish thoughts of a nature too serious even to bear the secret scrutiny of his own mind.

CHAPTER VIII.



THE slumbers of Virginia were short, and unrefreshing. The undivided heart of Herbert was a treasure of the highest value—a treasure so absolutely necessary to her happiness, that the mere possibility of another having once possessed it, gave her the deepest uneasiness, and she rose, pale and unwell, remembering that Arthur had promised to call for her that morning, as it was Mrs. Trelawny's rehearsal. Early as it was, Herbert was waiting for her in the drawing-room when she descended.

He also had passed a restless night; most bitter had been his reflections—most poignant his anguish. It had been to him an evening of mortification, which had originated in beholding the exposed

posed dress of her he loved dearer than life, and been increased by the intelligence which Alicia had contrived most artfully to give him, of the money which Virginia in fact had been compelled to receive from her brother. Alicia, however, had carefully concealed the charitable purpose to which it had been assigned, though it is more than probable that at that moment the mind of Herbert was too keenly alive to the indelicacy of borrowing money from a man to whom Virginia had once been affianced, even to have listened to its origin. Stung to the soul by what he considered as grossly improper, Arthur resolved to quit the ball, lest the agitation of his feelings, and the alteration of his looks, should give birth to questions which he felt as unwilling as he was unable to answer.

No sooner did he behold the pale cheek of Virginia than his affection took the alarm. He hastened to press

her extended hand, and to inquire after her health, which he feared had suffered from the dissipation of the preceding evening.

Virginia cast a glance of tender reproach on her lover.—“ I shall be better to-morrow,” said she; “ a night’s rest, and the certainty of your being perfectly well, will soon conduce to restore my own good looks. I was at first greatly alarmed by your singular absence. My fears lest you were indisposed, for to no other cause could I attribute your sudden departure, robbed me of all pleasure for the remainder of the evening.”

“ Dearest Virginia, I was indeed indisposed; yet perhaps I did wrong in quitting the room before I had seen you; and yet I was unwilling to damp the festivity of the amusement, by intruding on your ear any more of my old-fashioned notions.”

“ And did you believe that I could partake of that festivity, after you had

so abruptly left me to put what construction I pleased on your strange behaviour? To our friends it must have appeared even more singular than to me; for I thought you might have forgotten to finish some letters of consequence for India."

Virginia blushed deeply as she said this, for the penetrating eyes of Herbert seemed to search for her meaning.

"I finished my letters before I left home," said Arthur; "had it been otherwise, the claims of my Virginia are stronger than those of my Indian friends."

Virginia timidly ventured to raise her eyes to those of her lover. In them she read the sincerity of real passion, blended with truth and honour; and she would have been happy, had not the picture still dwelt on her remembrance. At that moment a servant brought a note from Miss Bateman, to apologize for not sending some trimming, as she had promised. Her mother had had a
 1 6 relapse,

relapse, and was not expected to outlive the day. "Poor girl!" said Virginia, in a voice of sweet compassion; "I must call on her when I return from Mrs. Trelawny."

This natural exclamation called forth some questions from Herbert, who was soon informed of the unfortunate situation of the Bateman family. "And why, my dear Virginia, have you delayed mentioning this circumstance to my mother? She would have been happy to have assisted your humane endeavours to mitigate the sufferings of this worthy young woman."

"I own that I have been to blame in this affair," replied Virginia, with embarrassment; "but I hope it is not yet too late to interest my dear Mrs. Herbert in her favour. When I first became acquainted with her distresses, my eagerness to relieve them made me promise more than I could at that moment perform. My brother was from home,
and

and it was of the utmost consequence that she should have a certain sum by such an hour. I was on the point of calling on your mother, and begging her assistance, when Alicia Glendore and her brother prevented me. Alicia insisted that I should accompany her to Loeschman's; I mentioned the engagement I was under as an excuse; Alicia good-naturedly insisted upon my allowing her brother to become my banker during the absence of lord de Morville. I excused myself, as I proposed calling at your house, to borrow from Mrs. Herbert the sum I was in need of. Alicia would not listen to me, and I was obliged to accept the assistance of Reuben, which enabled me to dispatch Amy immediately to Miss Bateman."

"I hope you have discharged your obligation to Mr. Glendore, Virginia?"

"The next night I returned the note to Alicia, requesting her to deliver it to her brother. Since then, a multiplicity
of

of engagements, and my knowledge that the circumstances of the poor girl were considerably mended, have made me delay mentioning her to your mother. I see that you think me culpable—I feel that I am so.”

Herbert, overjoyed to learn from her own lips the real statement of an affair which had caused him so much pain, and charmed by her candour, caught her to his bosom, and with equal candour acknowledged the reason of his absence. Yet he so contrived to gloss over the intelligence given him by Alicia, that Virginia had no cause to complain of her having betrayed her. Herbert implored her pardon for his abrupt departure, and was suffered to seal it on her dimpled cheek.

In the suddenness of Arthur's embrace, the hand of Virginia pressed against the miniature, which was suspended round his neck. “Tell me,” cried she, affecting a gaiety of manner, while

while her heart sunk within her, “ what is this powerful charm you bear about your person, to guard you from the spells of dissipation, and the weaknesses of human nature? Oh, impart to an erring creature, like myself, some portion of its influence, that I may grow wise and steady like yourself.”

Her hand still pressed the bosom of Arthur. Her lovely face was turned full on him, with a look of captivating entreaty. He gazed on her with fond affection, and returned confidence. He drew her gently towards him—“ Sweetest, dearest Virginia, you are not aware of the importance of your request. Yet how can I, who live but to anticipate your wishes, deny to gratify them? The charm I bear about me, and which has been my constant companion since I came to England, is indeed invaluable. I prize it more than life; never will I part with it; not even to you, dearest and loveliest Virginia.”

Virginia

Virginia had half withdrawn herself from his arms. Again her cheek was pale with fear, but Herbert held her close to his bosom: "If, my beloved, I betray to you the secret which I have guarded for so many months with religious veneration, a secret unknown even to my adored mother, will you be equally prudent. Time may develope the seeming mystery which consigned it to my care; until then, promise that no circumstance shall wrest from you the secret of my soul."

Virginia, faint and sick with apprehension of approaching evil, promised in a low voice to obey strictly the injunctions of her lover.

"Prepare then, dearest," said Herbert, smiling sweetly on his affianced bride, "to behold the resemblance of one whom I fondly hope to call my own by the most sacred of ties, one whose throbbing bosom, spite of all its thoughtlessness and fondness of praise, still loves
me

me dearly. Look, my lovely Virginia, look, and behold your rival."

Virginia, trembling and agitated, turned her half-closed eyes towards the hidden treasure of Arthur. They quickly expanded; she leaned forward; she attempted to take it, as, lost in wonder and astonishment, she beheld the miniature of herself.

"Tell me, dearest," cried Herbert, as he gazed on the original with delight and pride, "tell me, dearest, will you permit this long-cherished image to share with you all my love and admiration? will you suffer it to remain the companion of my bosom, the solace of my leisure hours? have I your leave to retain it until death?"

Virginia sunk on the shoulder of Herbert, who once more clasped her to his heart, and, pitying her agitated feelings, disclosed to her as much as he thought necessary of his father's last bequest.

"Thus you see, my beloved Virginia,
that

that Heaven has destined us for each other. Oh, with what tenderness have I dwelt on these enchanting features, before I knew the dear original of my miniature ! but no words can describe my emotions on being first introduced to my Virginia ; on finding her the daughter of the countess de Morville, of her whose memory is, and ever will be most sacred ! How I have loved thee, my Virginia, time will best prove. What I suffered before I ventured to hope you might be mine, is known only to myself."

Virginia's surprise now gave place to grateful tenderness, as she listened to this delicate avowal of her lover's constancy. " Surely," said she, as she examined with attention the resemblance of herself, " this must have been copied from a miniature painted at the desire of Mr. Glendore for my beloved Marian. Yet what could he purpose to himself by sending my resemblance to governor Herbert ?

Herbert? Perhaps he was related in some degree to my mother's family, and, from tenderness to her memory, had requested his friend to procure for him the likeness of her daughter. His consigning it at his death to your care, strengthens this idea. Ah! why was I denied the pleasure of loving, while living, a man whom you have taught me so highly to revere? And yet there is a mystery, my Arthur, about this picture, which alarms me. I cannot comprehend or imagine any circumstance which could render its concealment from your mother necessary."

"Do not agitate your mind, my dear Virginia, with useless surmises. It is evident that my father had our union in contemplation, when he presented to me your miniature. That he should conceal any thing from my mother, who was the idol of his soul, the being on earth whom he loved next to his Creator, is also a matter of wonder to me; but

but I wish not to dive into the private reasons of my father. I am satisfied with my lot. My lovely Virginia has accepted the homage of a heart which beats but for her. My mother sanctions my choice; what more have I to wish!"

The delicacy of Virginia was, however, far from satisfied. She felt that now she had a double motive to incite her to investigate the private concerns of her family, and she determined to call on her uncle, admiral Sedley, on the first opportunity. She now, for the first time, remembered her appointment at Mrs. Trelawny's, and perceiving by her repeater that they had already missed seeing the principal part of Pizarro rehearsed, they hastened with all possible expedition to be in time for Blue Beard.

During this conference in the drawing-room, Winifred Meredith and Amy were busily employed in getting ready the dress of the fair Fatima. Her aunt had, with her accustomed frugality, decided:

cided upon having it made at home, in order to save expence, and they were now obeying her orders. For the same economical reason, she had desired her niece not to take a part in the amusement, as it must put her to the unavoidable necessity of spending some of her treasured wealth.

To this Winifred readily consented. She had but little inclination even to be a spectator of a representation which enabled lord de Morville to give vent to feelings which similar ones had taught her to see that he cherished for the beautiful countess. Conscious that his affections were too deeply involved ever to fix upon herself, she had endeavoured, and with some success, to combat against the strength of her own tenderness. In doing this she was assisted by the belief, that, had she been the heiress of her aunt's fortune, his lordship would not have scrupled to sacrifice her repose to his own necessities. Notwithstanding
this

this opinion, so dishonourable to his lordship, and so painful to herself, the amiable Winifred continued deeply interested for the welfare of lord de Morville, and it was with the bitterest anguish that she beheld what seemed only visible to her, the fatal influence of a passion which could only end in the ruin and disgrace of its object, and the destruction of lord de Morville.

With a loquacity which was by no means impertinent or presuming, Amy, who had passed the preceding day at lady Deterville's, recapitulated to Winifred the various little tales of scandal which the countess's waiting-maid had detailed for her amusement. She had lived in several families of distinction, and was well acquainted with all their private movements, which she hesitated not to disclose to her visitor.

"I was vastly entertained, Miss Winifred," said Amy, "with the anecdotes related by Mrs. Staples, and 'thought
that

that I had never passed so agreeable an evening; but when she began to sift me for information respecting my dear lady Virginia, I wished myself well out of her company."

"What information did she expect, Amy, concerning one so young and innocent as lady Virginia Sedley?"

"I know not," replied Amy, "but she was evidently disappointed at my having nothing to say, and I believe would much rather have had me invent something than remain silent, after she had nearly tired herself with talking. 'Come now, dear Mrs. Amy,' said she, 'you need not fear my discretion. I have always a vast deal of respect for the failings of my superiors, and I can, if necessary, be as silent as death.' It was in vain that I assured her that my lady had no failings, that she was the best and dearest of human beings, that I had known her from a child, and could vouch for her goodness. 'All that may
be

be very true,' said Mrs. Staples; 'I do not doubt the goodness of lady Virginia any more than I do the prudence of Mrs. Amy; but what was the reason that her ladyship was no sooner informed of her rank, than she discarded her old lover for another, though to be sure she has bettered herself, both in person and fortune? I did hear, but I don't believe it, that young Mr. Glendore was the first to break off the match.'

"Foolish, ignorant woman!" cried Winifred, angrily.

"You may be sure, Miss Winifred, that I did not feel best pleased when Mrs. Staples said this. 'A likely matter, indeed,' said I, 'that any man in his senses should refuse the hand of so lovely a young creature as lady Virginia Sedley! My lady, no doubt, had her own reasons for rejecting Mr. Glendore, but it was not necessary that she should tell them to her maid.' Mrs. Staples appeared a little disconcerted at this.

'I am

‘ I am sure,’ said she, ‘ that I intended no disrespect to her ladyship; I have the highest veneration for her and lord de Morville; and I only regret that he is not our master. He is as generous and free-hearted, as a prince, and worships the very ground that the countess treads on.”

Winifred turned pale, and her fingers refused to obey her will. “ The countess is formed to be loved, Amy,” said she, in a quivering voice; “ she is even more beautiful than your lady.”

“ Oh, gracious, Miss Winifred! and is that your opinion? Well! for my part, though I think her ladyship uncommonly beautiful, yet, to my simple mind, she does not look as good, as kind-hearted, as tender as lady Virginia. But I must not say a word against the countess in my lady’s hearing; for I am certain that she worships her as much as my lord.”

Winifred was silent, and Amy continued—"To be sure, as Mrs. Staples said, it is a pity that so young and lovely a lady as the countess should have been sacrificed to please the ambition of her parents. How could they flatter themselves that their daughter would love a husband forty years older than herself? It is not in nature, Miss Winifred, is it?"

"I am a poor judge, Amy, but I think that I could not fail to be grateful to any one who was as good to me, and loved me as tenderly as lord Deterville does the countess."

"You were always amiable, Miss," replied Amy; "but I assure you that I should not like a husband so much older than myself; for, as Mrs. Staples says, he would seem more like a father than any thing else."

"Perhaps so, Amy, but that is a consideration *before* marriage. Lord Deterville

terville is still a pleasing companion, and gratitude will of course secure to him the affection of his countess."

"Lord bless you! Miss Winifred, there seems to be very little affection among people of quality. Separate beds, separate parties—oh gracious! it would not do for me. But I am poor and humble, so, thank Heaven! I was not born to marry one man and love another."

Winifred preserved a painful silence.

"Mrs. Staples *seems* to be rather too much in the confidence of her lady. I am sure I pity the countess as much as any body can; but I think she should be more careful before her servants, and not give them liberty to say that she values even the dirt which clings to the shoes of my young master."

"Fie, Amy, fie! you did wrong to listen to such scandal, and are still more to be condemned for repeating the wicked falsehoods of that talkative woman."

Amy begged that Winifred would not be offended, for that she would never mention it to any other person, and that she was not to blame; for it was impossible to still the tongue of Mrs. Staples, who had declared to her that all the servants regarded lord de Morville as their master more than they did the earl.

Shocked at this intelligence, Winifred could only caution Amy against either giving credit to it or mentioning it again. "The reputation of the countess is too sacred," said she, "to be trifled with. Such a report might not only endanger the life of lord de Morville, but cause serious uneasiness to lord Deterville and her relations."

Amy promised silence. "God forbid," said she, "that sir David should hear even a whisper of the kind; for Mrs. Staples says that he is a very high-spirited young man, and very watchful of his sister's honour."

Winifred trembled as the idea crossed
her

her mind that such watchfulness was, alas! but too necessary. She sighed at what might be the probable termination of lord de Morville's fatal attachment; and while she acknowledged that the extreme beauty of the countess, and the delicacy of her situation, gave room for the report, she yet felt that it was her duty to combat against yielding to a passion at once disgraceful to herself and destructive to her lover. Winifred thought of the magic eye of the countess as the lines of Burns occurred to her:—

It's jet jet black, and it's like a hawk,
And it winna let a body bee:

for there was an indescribable fascination that lurked within the dark orbs of lady Deterville, and seemed to possess a supernatural power; and to this she ascribed the enchantment of lord de Morville.

Virginia, though pressed for time, as Mrs. Trelawny had fixed an early day

for the opening of her theatre, stole a couple of hours to devote to her uncle. He had manifested for her the warmest affection, and deplored the continuance of that disorder which confined him to his house, thereby robbing him of more than half of his niece's society. Herbert had been lately introduced to him; he seemed as if struck by the name, and kept musing for some time, but he, nevertheless, expressed his satisfaction at the match, and his hopes that it would prove a happy one. He had repeatedly asked Virginia and her brother several questions as to the family of Arthur, but they were ignorant of every particular, except its wealth and goodness. He felt a wish to know more of it, but his debility, and the retirement in which he was obliged to live, precluded him from making the inquiries which he seemed to think necessary.

Virginia, after expressing the tenderest concern for his sufferings, gradually
led

led to the subject at that moment nearest her heart. "Dearest uncle," said she, "is it not strange that I, who am keenly alive to all that concerns my parents, should even be ignorant of the name of the family to which my mother belonged? I have no cause of sorrow now, save that which is occasioned by my anxiety to know more of my mother."

"My dear girl," replied the veteran, solicitous to relieve her curiosity, "perhaps I can afford you all the necessary information on that point. Your mother, who I am told was one of the loveliest women ever presented at court, was the only daughter of a major Churchill. At sixteen she was married to my brother, who fell in love with her when she was on a visit at the house of a friend. The disparity of their years was no bar to their nuptials. He married her with the consent of her father, and I believe with her own. The

duties of my profession prevented my ever seeing her, but I know that I could not help condemning a man of lord de Morville's gloomy and suspicious temper, when I heard that he had chosen for a wife so young and lovely a girl."

"Were my parents happy, my dear uncle?" inquired Virginia, earnestly.

"That is a serious question, my dear niece. I can only say, that if lady de Morville *was* happy, by Heaven! it was more than any other person could be with my brother. From his infancy he displayed a disposition so inimical to domestic happiness, that I am surprised how he could ever think of becoming a family man."

"But, my dear uncle, can you form any idea why my father was so cruelly prejudiced against me, that after my mother's death he never permitted me to see him?"

"It is no matter, my sweet girl," replied the admiral, turning hastily in his chair;

chair; "his last moments agree with the rest of his life. Never was a woman more completely thrown away than Miss Churchill, and, if she was a bad wife, by Heaven! he made her so."

Poor Virginia both looked and felt most painfully agitated. The plain and unvarnished language of her uncle, and the honest warmth of his feelings, only convinced her that he knew more than he thought proper to reveal. "Ah," said she, trying to suppress a sigh, "I perceive, my dearest uncle, that it is not from *you* I am to gain the information I so ardently seek after. I feel assured that my parents were not happy in each other, and that, if I resemble my mother, that is the reason of my father's dislike."

"The recapitulation of domestic feuds, my Virginia, is but little calculated to give satisfaction to a mind like yours. Do not allow your own happiness to be alloyed by a blamable curiosity, but
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learn,

learn, my dear child, to make the most of every comfort you possess.' It seems as if the manly tenderness of Mr. Herbert would protect you from those domestic inquietudes which are now so prevalent, and I think that gratitude, affection, and obedience, on the part of my dearest niece, cannot fail of ensuring her felicity."

Virginia saw that it was vain to expect any intelligence from her uncle, notwithstanding which, she became more anxious to solve the apparent mystery which hung over the fate of her mother, and from some feeling, strange and undefinable even to herself, she felt that it ought to be performed before she became the wife of Herbert. Yet to whom, except to his mother, could she venture to make so delicate an inquiry? The discovery of the miniature proved at least that Mr. Glendore was acquainted with her rank, before it was even disclosed to herself, and his concealing it from his
own

own family authorized her to believe that he was not ignorant of the private concerns of her own.

The singular secrecy attached to the gift which governor Herbert had bestowed on his son, gave rise to a variety of conjectures, which not even the creative mind of Virginia could satisfy. The more she dwelt on the subject, the more she was bewildered. It seemed to her to be impossible to account for the governor's not mentioning to his wife, that England contained a young and unprotected relation, whose situation in life would have been so much meliorated by her protecting tenderness; and unless he was related to her, what could have been the motive of Mr. Glendore in sending her miniature so privately to India? what also could have been the motive of the governor for bequeathing it to his son?

Fortunately for Virginia, her engagements were so numerous, and her hours

of retirement so few, that she had little leisure to brood over her own family secrets, while the steady and endearing tenderness of Herbert, and the captivating attentions shewn her by lady Deterville, left her but little room for private regrets.

CHAPTER IX.

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NOTHING could excel the witchery of Virginia's appearance, when habited in the attire of Fatima, which she had put on at the request of Mrs. Herbert, who called purposely on lord de Morville, that she might see him and his sister in their theatrical attire. Lady Deterville good-naturedly attended, in order to increase the pleasure of Mrs. Herbert, who, as she gazed on the finely-proportioned form of  
the

the beautiful representative of Cora, and read in the expressive dark eyes of her Alonzo his admiration, sighed to think that fate had placed a bar to the union of two beings, who, had they been destined for each other, bid fair to have become models of conjugal felicity.

The possibility, however, that their hearts had dared to forget the sacred bar to mutual love which for ever divided them, the possibility also that honour, while it governed their actions, would have no power to influence their feelings, and the consequent misery to which they must be consigned, diffused a gloom over the countenance of Mrs. Herbert; while her own private reflections, joined to the many amiable qualities of the young countess, made her deeply lament that she was sacrificed to the ambitious views of parental authority.

There was a natural grace, a peculiar charm, which dwelt in every word and action of the countess of Deterville, a  
warmth



warmth of heart, a sincerity of manner, that endeared her to Mrs. Herbert. Not to pity her was next to impossible. Her father, without ever consulting her inclinations, had united her to a man whose age and experience were more calculated to excite respect than affection, in the breast of a young and lively girl, whose extreme beauty made her the object of general admiration.

With lord de Morville for a partner through life, she could have welcomed even the approach of poverty, content to have toiled through the day for their mutual subsistence, her reward, his smile, his caress.

It has already been observed, that lady Deterville, on first discovering the state of her affections, would have flown from their object, had she been able. Circumstances conspired against her; and the dangerous friendship of lady Elizabeth Lester contributed to undermine her moral delicacy. Habit at length made the

the society of lord de Morville necessary to her happiness; and she heard of the earl's visit into Dorsetshire with manifest satisfaction, since his absence would enable her to enjoy for three weeks the almost constant society of lord de Morville.

Lady Elizabeth Lester was but too favourable to this criminal attachment. She hated lord Deterville as much as she loved and pitied his wife, and her house was the place chosen for their secret meetings; yet at times, the inherent virtue of the countess made her shudder at the guilty part she was acting. As yet she only stood on the verge of the river's brink—she had not plunged into the stream. It was her mind only that swerved from innocence; yet she had felt all the horrors of a breach of faith. The sound of her husband's voice, the glance of his eye, robbed her cheek of its bloom, while every temporary absence from home brought with it a sickening dread,

dread, lest chance should discover to the earl the state of her alienated mind. Lady Elizabeth laughed at her sufferings, made light of her fears, and declared that it was no more than the earl deserved, for his inordinate vanity in supposing that a man of his years could win the affection of a girl, almost young enough to be his grandchild.

The first step is every thing. Lady Deterville had, by degrees, allowed herself to believe that, while her affection for lord de Morville was circumscribed by prudence, her sin was not of an unpardonable nature; and this fatal idea daily gained strength in her mind. She suffered herself to think on her crime, until it became familiar to her, till at length she lost all power, all inclination, to tear herself away from its object.

Lord de Morville was even more infatuated than the young countess. His love could scarcely be restrained within bounds; yet his feelings were more poignant,

nant, if possible, than those of lady Deterville. Hurried away by his unbounded affection, he was nevertheless fully sensible of the enormity of his offence. He shrunk beneath the confiding look of the man whose honour and happiness he was privately seeking to destroy. He respected lord Deterville; but he adored his wife. The silent upbraidings of his own heart embittered every moment that was not passed in her society; and had it not been for the counsels of lady Elizabeth, he had once resolved to leave England, and thus preserve his fidelity to the hospitable and unsuspecting earl, and save his beloved Isabella from the possibility of sharing his disgrace and comparative poverty.

Love, and lady Elizabeth's raillery, triumphed over the last struggles of his expiring honour. No longer master of his passions, he became their prey. Conscious that he was acting a deceitful part, he could not, without difficulty, bring himself

himself to accept the proffered hand of the earl, or the unreserved friendship of sir David Montgomery; and he therefore heard of lord Deterville's journey with sensations of indescribable pleasure, which was lessened only by the reflection that sir David remained in town, whose high spirit and keen sense of honour, naturally led him to be a watchful observer of whatever might affect *that* of any part of his family. Opposed to his sagacity, however, was the cunning of lady Elizabeth; she was resolved; and he must be more than mortal who could out-general lady Elizabeth.

The opening of Mrs. Trelawny's private theatre was an event of consequence in the fashionable world. The house was crowded by the most brilliant display of nobility, who were anxious to behold the lovely countess in the interesting character of Cora, as well as to hear Virginia warble the sweet songs of Fatima. A fine boy of two years old  
had

had been tutored to represent the child of Cora; and lady Deterville proposed to sing that charming air which is generally left out at the theatres.

The dignified form of Alicia Glendore well accorded with the spirited soul of the haughty Elvira. Sir David Montgomery was Pizarro, and he looked and moved a hero; while the noble Rolla was most admirably personified by Reuben Glendore, who called forth the repeated plaudits of genuine and deserved admiration. The chaste tenderness of Cora and her Alonzo was beautifully delineated by the countess and lord de Morville. Their own feelings led them to enter into their separate characters, and to make more of them than mere stage performance.

Herbert and Virginia sat in Mrs. Trelawny's box. The former was too much of a lover himself not to tremble for the consequence of a passion which every look and gesture of the enamoured de Morville

Morville now betrayed. He seemed as if he was licensed that evening to pour forth all the fondness of his soul; while the jet black eyes of the too-fascinating Cora melted with mutual tenderness.

Herbert saw and shuddered for his friend. To him the marriage vow was a thing so hallowed, that he could admit of no excuse for its violation; and he therefore determined to make one attempt to save his adopted brother from the commission of a crime, which would render him for ever an alien to his heart. He also felt a generous wish to preserve, if possible, the young countess from the horrors of unavailing repentance, as well as to protect from ruin the beloved friend of his own beloved Virginia.

Virginia was in high spirits. She had that morning received a letter from Miss Glendore, which held out the most sanguine hopes of Marian's recovery, as she was already better from the Bath waters. The novelty of her present situation,  
when

when habited as Fatima, the timidity occasioned by her having to appear before so many, some of whom were strangers to her, checked however the exuberance of her spirits; but the encouraging smiles of Herbert, and of her friends, soon made her rally them, and go through her part with inimitable grace and sweetness. Not even Miss Bolton, the lovely Fatima of Covent-Garden, could look or move with more syren sweetness than did the sister of lord de Morville; and if sir David performed to admiration the part of Abomelique, it was because at heart he would fain have ravished from Selim his adored Fatima.

The amusement of the evening closed with an elegant supper, at which Mrs. Trelawny proposed, that as no dress could be more becoming than that now worn by her theatrical guests, they should all, if agreeable to themselves, appear in the same attire at her masked ball, which was fixed for that day fortnight. To  
this



this they readily consented; and Mrs. Meredith thought it a most admirable proposal, as it would save lord de Morville the ruinous expence of new dresses for himself and his sister.

In case of her niece being compelled to accompany her friend, she intended to hire one for her at the cheapest price for the occasion; and as some habits were more costly than others, and consequently more expensive, Mrs. Meredith determined to call at the warehouse, and inquire the different prices before she allowed Winifred to make her election. As for herself, she had already determined to go as an old beggar-woman, a character which she felt herself well calculated to support, and which required no other attire than what could be obtained from some of her cast-off mourning.

Upon inquiring at the warehouse, Mrs. Meredith learned that the lowest price for the plainest dress was by far too

too much for her purse. She therefore returned to St. James's Place, resolved to frame some excuse for Winifred's not going to Mrs. Trelawny's; but Virginia pleaded so warinly for her friend, that the old lady at length yielded, with this proviso, that she should so contrive as to chuse a character which would only require such materials for her dress, as her own, or lady Virginia's, wardrobe would furnish.

The friends, left alone to themselves, began to consider how they might obey the wishes of Mrs. Meredith, as well as gratify their own. Not that Winifred felt any particular desire to mingle in a scene which would again bring to her sight lord de Morville, in a character which but too well licensed the impassioned tenderness of his heart; but Virginia would be disappointed by her refusal, and Winifred was not of a nature to disappoint any human creature, if it depended on her own will. She therefore

fore made choice of the simple attire of a flower-girl, as best suited to the restriction she was under. This met with the approbation of Mrs. Meredith, who expressed great satisfaction, because it would not even deprive her of a solitary shilling.

“ I tell you what, Winny, my child,” said the old lady, “ you shall make me up an apron of patch-work, for I shall be nothing without an apron, and I have got plenty of pieces, which will do for that purpose. My old black gown and coat, that I wear when I garden at the cottage, will serve me, though I think they are rather too good; but, however, as I have no others, they must do. A mob cap, and my large beaver hat, will just be the thing, and my patched apron; but what shall I do for a cloak?”

“ Oh,” cried Virginia, gaily, “ I saw Amy the other morning with a square piece of faded green baize; I believe it had been the cat’s bed; but you know,  
my

my dear madam, if it is well cleaned, it may make a very good cloak for a beggar-woman. And what think you of carrying a little basket, with a few pin-cushions, iron-holders, and thread-cases; you would find, I am certain, plenty of customers; and, if agreeable to you, Winifred and I will make them."

"Charming! charming!" cried the old lady, rubbing her hands in an ecstasy, "I should like it vastly. You are both of you dear good girls; make as many as you please; I dare say I shall sell them all, for every body will guess who made them. Apropos! I will go this very minute to Mrs. Herbert, and ask her to search among her treasures for bits of silk, ribbons, velvets, &c. I know that she will willingly accommodate me. Any message, Virginia, to Arthur?"

"Only tell him, my dear madam, that I had expected to see him this morning, with the book he promised to read to

me; and that I am engaged to pass the evening with lady Deterville."

Virginia had scarcely finished the sentence, when Herbert's curricie drove up to the door, and the next moment he entered the drawing-room.

## CHAPTER X.



"MY own dearest Fatima!" said Herbert, pressing her to his bosom with an agitated air, "I should have been here two hours ago, but for your brother; he has only just left my mother's."

"His visit was of a private nature I suppose," replied Virginia, smiling, "as he did not mention it to me."

"Neither should I, my beloved, did I not know that the hasty temper of de  
Morville

Morville would betray itself. He called on me this morning upon business; and I felt pleased that I had so good an opportunity to use the privilege of a friend, to remonstrate with him upon a subject which has long given me the most serious uneasiness. I had hoped that the affection which we feel for each other would have induced him to receive from me the gentle counsels of disinterested regard; but I was deceived; he betrayed a warmth of temper, which only proved the truth of my suspicions, and made me more anxious to convince him of his imprudence. We parted, on his side, in anger, and I hastened to fulfil my engagement to you."

"And may I not inquire," said Virginia, timidly, "what that subject may be, which could make my brother forget the claims you have upon his gratitude and forbearance?"

Winifred rose to leave the room.

"Stay, my dear Winifred," continued

Virginia; “Arthur and I have no secrets from you. I hope he will yet have time to read to us this morning.”

Herbert drew from his pocket the promised volume; but the eyes of Virginia reminded him that her question remained unanswered—“Your brother, my love, will not fail to narrate to you the cause of his displeasure. I regret that any thing should have made it necessary for me to call it forth.”

“Then do you refuse to gratify my curiosity?” said Virginia, in a tone of vexation. “How can I judge with fairness between you, unless I hear both sides of the question?”

“Even then, my beloved, you will be guided principally by your own affection, which will lead you to side with your brother, in favour of the friend you love, and, like him, may deem my advice obtrusive and impertinent.”

Virginia raised her eyes to those of her lover; they reproached him for his suspicions.

picious. He took her soft white hand in his, and kissing it affectionately, said —“ I will venture then to disclose the cause of our misunderstanding, though, in so doing, I shall unavoidably give pain to my adored Virginia; since I must own to her that I condemn most strongly the general conduct of a favourite friend; and am shocked at the glaring impropriety of lady Elizabeth Lester's behaviour with respect to lady Deterville and lord de Morville, the latter of whom rumour no longer hesitates to call the lover of the countess.”

Virginia started, and Winifred turned pale—“ The beauty of the countess, the age of her husband, and the constant devotion of de Morville, are things which call forth the remarks of the censorious. I have long lamented that the chief part of my Virginia's time should be devoted to a connexion which will inevitably include her within the pale of censure, and



which has made her neglect one who loves her with all the fondness of a mother, but who, like myself, was content to suffer the disappointment of her hopes, while the public voice was silent with respect to the character of her who occasioned it. The hour is at length arrived, my Virginia, when it is necessary that you should give up your connexion with lady Deterville. It was but last night that I heard discussed in a coffee-room, the rumours of the day. It seems that the world has long associated your brother's name with that of lady Deterville. The tenderness of his feelings, in representing the part of Alonzo, was, I fear, but too visible to every spectator, nor was that of his Cora less obtrusive; it has roused the public voice against them: some affect to pity the young countess, while others make de Morville the subject of their sympathy; but every honest mind joins in feeling a regret that  
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the earl should have placed such unlimited confidence in a man who has proved himself unworthy of his trust."

Herbert rose in agitation, and walked towards the window. Virginia's tears, however, quickly recalled him; while those of Winifred Meredith fell fast on the work, which she had by this time completely spoiled. Arthur, with inexpressible tenderness, wiped away the trickling drops from the eyes of his beloved, who, as she leaned her head on his shoulder, vainly endeavoured to repress an anguish almost the keenest she had ever endured.

Affected by her distress, he tried every means to console her. He entered into her feelings, and threw out a hope that it might not yet be too late to convince the countess of her error, save her from destruction, and render her worthy the romantic fondness of Virginia.

"Oh!" cried Virginia, with confiding innocence of heart, "I will pledge my  
L 4
life

life for the purity of lady Deterville's mind and actions. I know how dearly she regards de Morville, but it is with the chaste tenderness of an adoring sister. My brother and myself are the two beings whom on earth she loves most. Sacrificed to the ambition of her father, robbed of all hopes of domestic happiness, her heart naturally clings to those who, like herself, are capable of appreciating the value of what she has for ever lost. Ah, my poor Isabella! and is the world jealous of the few comforts left you to enjoy? must it seek to tear from you the friends of your soul, to destroy at once the remnant of your hopes?"

"Dearest Virginia," replied Herbert, "I am grieved to see you thus deeply agitated. Your affection for lady Deterville appears to rival every other; it has even blinded you, my beloved, against the suggestions of your own reason, and lulled to sleep the secret admonitions of prudence and female delicacy. Lady  
Deterville

Deterville is a wife—has not her husband the strongest claim upon her affection and duty? is not the earl the properest person to be the guardian of her happiness, and the bestower of it?”

“The earl is more calculated to excite respect than love,” said Virginia. “How was it possible that a young and fascinating woman, like the countess, could feel for him that solicitude, that tenderness, which might have belonged to him thirty years ago? And is it lady Deterville’s fault that the loveliness of her person calls forth the envy of her own sex, and the admiration of yours?”

“Certainly not, Virginia. Lady Deterville is formed to inspire admiration; but it is her duty not to seek it. The love of praise is inherent in the human bosom; but it should be that praise which virtue need not blush to hear. I see that it is reserved for eloquence more powerful than mine, to convince my lovely Virginia that, like the wife of Cæsar, it

is necessary that *her friend* should not even be *suspected* of infidelity. If you are disengaged this evening, my sweet bride, my mother would be happy to see you."

"This evening," said Virginia, blushing, "I promised to spend with the countess, and I cannot, with propriety, break my word."

Herbert bowed coldly, and dropping the hand of Virginia, turned towards Miss Meredith—"Do you accompany lady Virginia?" said he, rising from his chair, "or are you, my amiable friend, more open to conviction?"

Winifred replied in a tremulous voice, that she was under no engagement. Arthur then requested leave to call and attend her to his mother, who was rather indisposed, and therefore would esteem her visit as an additional act of kindness. Winifred readily consented, and Herbert, still preserving the same air of offended pride, again turned to Virginia, who

who inwardly felt and acknowledged the justice of his reproof.

“ May I tell my mother that, but for your engagement to the countess of Derterville, you would have seen her this evening?”

“ Certainly. I am convinced that Mrs. Herbert is the last person in the world to sanction a breach of politeness. Remember me to her with every sentiment of gratitude and affection, and tell her that I will call on her, if possible, to-morrow.”

Herbert now took his leave. He had just quitted the drawing-room, when Alicia Glendore, who, from the opposite house, had seen him enter that of lord de Morville, and who had witnessed his agitation when he stood for a few minutes at the window, entered to inquire the cause.

“ What, in the name of good faith, my dear Virginia,” said she, embracing her, “ is the matter with Herbert? I

met him in the hall, looking as grave and demure as if you had altered your mind, and resolved to make him wear the willow in favour of sir David Montgomery. Apropos! the brother puts me in mind of the sister. Never did I witness such acting before; both lady Deterville and the gay de Morville entered with heart and soul into the spirit of their parts. So tender, so yielding a Cora, so adoring, so eloquent an Alonzo; even the noble character of Rolla seemed to give way before that of the doting husband; I assure you the general opinion was, that they acted it to the life."

Virginia coloured deeply.

"Between ourselves, my dear girl, I am afraid that the beauty of the countess, and the marked attentions of your gallant brother, have already created her many enemies. During the representation of *Blue Beard*, I accompanied Mrs. Trelawny into a box which had been appropriated for the reception of the duke  
of

of M—— and his family. His grace was conversing with a gentleman who sat next him, and whose dignified air and sunburnt countenance, joined to the silver locks which shaded his temples, prepossessed me strongly in his favour. They were discoursing on the merits of the several performers, and it was with pleasure that I heard my name mentioned, by them both, in terms of warm commendation; yet I felt grieved to find that my friend lord de Morville was thought to be too much of the real lover, to personify the supposed husband of the beautiful Cora.”

Virginia, mortified and vexed to find that rumour has a hundred tongues, could not conceal her chagrin from the quick-sighted Alicia, who artfully drew from her the whole of the conversation that had passed between her and Herbert.

“ Ah, my dear girl!” said she, sighing with pretended sorrow, “ I fear that  
there



there is but too much reason for the dislike which Arthur has ever shewn towards the countess. I really begin to tremble for your brother; nothing but sir David's *extreme* affection for yourself could so long have blinded him to the impropriety of his sister's conduct. He is a high-spirited young man with nice feelings, and a delicate sense of family pride, which if once awakened, will not easily be lulled. Something must be done to snatch your brother from the danger of his present situation."

"I will apply to the countess myself this evening," said Virginia; "I know that I have great power over her, and that the least idea of any danger happening to my brother will determine her conduct immediately."

Alicia smiled almost contemptuously at the easy credulity of the young novice in fashionable life—"You will do well," said she, "to try that influence. My brother Reuben is seriously alarmed  
for

for lord de Morville, as well as for yourself; he has desired Dorinda and myself to excuse ourselves from attending lady Deterville's next party. You may judge, therefore, of *his* opinion."

Tears rushed into the eyes of Virginia—"I see," said she, "that all my friends have conspired against the countess. It is in vain for me to balance my affection and my firm belief in her innocence against their united force; I can only lament in silence the injustice of the world, and prove the extent of my friendship in the constancy of my attachment."

"Be guarded, at least," replied Alicia, "in your sentiments, since they are not in unison with those of your affianced husband. Arthur Herbert is already jealous of sir David; he may be inclined to impute your obstinate adherence to lady Deterville's clouded fame to a less disinterested motive than friendship for herself; beware, my friend, of giving him

him just grounds for his jealousy to feed on."

"I hope, nay, I trust in Heaven, that he is not of a jealous nature," replied Virginia, fervently; "for I am unfortunately of a disposition so gay and unreflecting, that I may very innocently call it forth when, in fact, I least intend it. But did the sunburnt stranger notice my poor endeavours to sustain the part of Fatima?"

"His praise seemed too warm for that of a stranger," said Alicia. "During the time of your appearance his eyes never wandered from your person. He looked enchanted by your voice; and when his grace inquired what he thought of the new Fatima, he replied, that he had been too much attracted by your voice and features to think of your performance. 'Lady Virginia Sedley,' said his grace, 'is the sister of lord de Morville, the Alonzo, indeed I may say, the Adonis of the night, for he is certainly a  
fine

fine young man.'—' Good Heaven !' exclaimed the stranger, ' is that sweet girl a daughter of the countess de Morville ?' He then whispered something in the ear of his grace, but I could only catch a word or two, and therefore must not venture to repeat them. He looked on you as you again appeared, and I thought that his countenance expressed a tender melancholy, as if caused by some painful recollections—' She is lovely,' sighed the stranger, ' but not to be compared to what her mother was at her age—pray God she may prove more fortunate, more worthy of the love she seems already to have inspired in the bosom of her Selim !'—' That is the son of governor Herbert,' said the duke ; ' lady Virginia is betrothed to him.' A start of surprise, a look of incredulity, rivetted my attention more firmly on the stranger. He was about to speak, when the provoking duchess addressed me, and the next moment the fall of the curtain gave

gave Mrs. Trelawny an opportunity to return to her own box."

Virginia's thoughts were now diverted into a new channel at the mention of her mother's name; all else was forgotten, and she seemed scarcely to breathe during the narration of her false friend—"Oh, my Alicia!" said she, pressing her hands with energy, "it is from this stranger that I shall learn the long wished-for intelligence respecting my dear mother. It is evident that he knew her; what would I give to see him! Were you not able to learn his name?"

"I learnt from Mrs. Trelawny that the stranger was sir Charles Blandford, a man of noble family and fortune, who is but just returned from India, and distantly related to the duke, who, as he is a single man, is in great expectation that his children may come in for a share of sir Charles's property. You will most probably see him on Wednesday if you go to the duchess's rout."

Virginia

Virginia was otherwise engaged, but she determined, nevertheless, to look in, if only for half-an-hour. Her curiosity was most painfully excited, and the stranger alone seemed to have power to allay it—"I must see sir Charles, I must speak to him," said she, sighing deeply; "but, dear Alicia, I know that my brother plays high, and that Reuben has repeatedly warned him of his danger. To-night he goes to St. James's-street; perhaps——"

"I know what you would say," cried Alicia, rising; "Reuben will be there; you may rely on his friendship." Then imprinting on the fair cheek of Virginia a traitor's kiss, she took leave, secretly pleased that Virginia's attachment to lady Deterville promised to occasion a coldness between her and Herbert, and hoping that ere long, the aspiring spirit of Virginia would meet with a second humiliation more severe than the first.

Lord de Morville returned to dinner,  
out

out of humour with himself and with every body else—"So, Virginia," said he, carelessly pulling up his boots, "Herbert has already assumed to himself the privilege of an elder brother; he has begun to criticise on my actions with all the freedom of an old acquaintance, and actually told me this morning that I was in the high road to ruin."

"God forbid!" exclaimed his sister, earnestly.

"Follow me to my dressing-room, and you shall know more," said his lordship, hastily leading the way; "we have nobody to dinner but ourselves, and therefore need make but little alteration in our dress. You look pale, Virginia; stir the fire, it is devilish cold."

"But the cause, my dear brother; you were going to tell me the cause of Herbert's remonstrating."

"True," said the young lord, hastily tearing open his waistcoat, as if he had been oppressed rather by heat than cold;

"well

“ well then, I called this morning on Arthur for a fresh supply of money—why do you look so aghast? shall I not repay him when I come of age? He gave me the sum I wanted without any hesitation, and I in return presented him with my bond for ten thousand pounds. You look petrified, my dear girl; but never mind, after to-night I will not touch another card; lucky or unlucky, I will forswear play.”

“ Do, my best-loved brother, do, for God’s sake, make a solemn vow to abstain from so fatal an amusement !”

“ Well, well, I tell you I will; but don’t look so grave. That confounded fellow Herbert has spoiled all my pleasure for a week to come, with his ill-timed advice and his silly forebodings. It is my maxim to enjoy life while I can, and to take no thought of the morrow; does not the scripture say so, *Virginia?*”

“ Yes; and it also says, my dear brother,

ther,



ther, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife; does it not, my brother?"

"Why, the devil! *you* are not leagued against me, are you, Virginia? By Heaven, this is too much; that fellow has been beforehand with me, and poisoned your mind against me and against our dearest friend."

"No, my brother, you judge too hastily of Arthur; his advice may have come unwelcome, but his motive could only have been your welfare." Her eyes caught a glimpse of the brilliants which surrounded the miniature worn by lord de Morville, and which was now become visible through the bosom of his shirt. A ray of hope instantly crossed the mind of Virginia that this might be the picture of one whose claim to the heart of de Morville might clear the fame of her beloved countess.

"Ah!" cried she, aiming at vivacity, "you are at best but a deceiver, my dear brother, and under the appearance of  
being

being the devoted slave of my poor aspersed Isabella, are, in reality, the captive of some other fair, whose picture I just now had a peep of."

The young lord coloured violently, and hastily closed his bosom.

"That is cruel now, my brother; I should have thought that you knew me better than to suspect my prudence. I should have thought also, that you knew enough of my affection not to deem me unworthy of your confidence."

Lord de Morville looked irresolute—  
 "No, no, I dare not trust you, Virginia; Herbert has too much power over your mind for me to make you the confidant of my fatal passion; he would persuade you to abandon its object, and by so doing, drive me to desperation."

The roses fled from the cheek of Virginia; she felt the misery of being at length compelled to suspect that innocence which she in the morning had defended with unguarded warmth. She  
 looked

looked at lord Morville, his eyes shrank from the scrutiny of hers—"Ah, my brother!" said she, bursting into tears, "what have you said? Concealment is at an end; it is the countess that you love—it is my dear Isabella whom your cruel tenderness will destroy!"

Her sobs almost unmanned de Morville; he flung his arms round her waist, and kissing her pale, cold cheek, besought her to hear him—"It is in vain to deny what the purity of your own mind, Virginia, alone prevented you from discovering before. Alas! it is but too true that I love, that I adore Isabella; my very being seems to hang upon her breath; I cannot exist without her—nay, do not break from my arms, Virginia—do not add to my despair—do not abandon me to my destiny! I have strove to tear her from my heart; I have even prayed to have the power to free myself from her fascinating charms. I have tried what absence would do, but still her image followed

followed me. I thought of the sacrifice she had been obliged to make to ambition; I remembered that my love, unhallowed as it was, still had power to soften the severity of her fate; that my presence gave to Isabella the only happiness she could now possess. I felt it cowardly to fly from the woman who for my sake was willing to hazard the censure of the world. I returned, and found her ill. Though delicacy forbade *her* revealing to me the cause, yet our steady friend, lady Elizabeth, betrayed to me the occasion of her disorder. Could I do less than remain? Could I do less than dedicate to her that life which, without her smile, would become insupportable. Ah; I see you condemn me; you shrink from the touch of a seducer; you will shun the caresses of my Isabella; and she who would brave the scandal of the world will die beneath the unkind neglect of her dearest friend!"

Lord de Morville struck his clenched hand with violence against his forehead,

as he covered his face to conceal his terrible agitation. Virginia, alarmed by his appearance, and shocked beyond measure by his words and manner, still felt her heart warm towards his affliction. She pressed him to her bosom; scalding tears of anguish fell on his burning face as she fondly kissed it, while in the softest accents she assured him, that never would she forget either the gratitude she owed to him as her brother, or the affection which she had professed for lady Deterville.

The young lord seemed revived by this assurance—"You have taken from my heart a load which has long oppressed it," said he, returning her embrace; "I know the noble generosity of your nature, my Virginia, yet I feared lest the already alarmed prudence of Arthur might induce you to give up my adored Isabella. I knew also, that her affection for you would make such a step fatal to her: but you will not abandon her, my sister. In spite of the cold suggestions  
of

of interest, you will continue to cherish the unhappy Isabella. Should all the world desert her, still my Virginia will remain to soothe and console her under her misfortunes!"

Virginia trembled violently; she wished to advise, but she feared to irritate her brother; yet she felt that it was her duty at least to remonstrate—"Surely, my dear brother," said she, looking tenderly in his changeful countenance, "you have not determined upon the actual necessity of lady Deterville yielding to an attachment which must sink her in the estimation even of her most partial friends? How are you certain that she feels for you the same criminal affection which has smothered in your breast every feeling but that of love?"

"See, and be convinced of our mutual tenderness," replied lord de Morville, opening his breast, and exposing the exquisite features of lady Deterville.

For the first time Virginia beheld them with a painful shudder—"Yes, I am in-

deed convinced," said she, sighing bitterly, and turning away her head; "alas! what dreadful infatuation could tempt the countess to bestow on you her resemblance? Had she no friend, no guardian angel to remind her of her duties, when she allowed herself to forget the sacred claim lord Deterville had on her fidelity?"

"Remember, Virginia, that you once said, were you lady Deterville, you should always feel for the earl the veneration of a daughter, but that you could never love him as a husband. These were your own words, my sister."

"I acknowledge them as such, my dear brother, and were I lady Deterville, I would hold the honour and happiness of the earl as sacred as if he were indeed my parent; but were I you——"

"You would act as I do. I know what you would say, Virginia; I know all that a virtuous heart, which has never been tempted to err, would advise. Herbert has said every thing to alarm  
my

my tenderness, to awaken my fears; but my fate has willed it so—I have gone too far to recede with honour.”

“Honour!” repeated Virginia, emphatically; “honour, my brother? oh, do not imagine that honour can influence your present feelings! honour would prompt you to respect the hospitable faith of lord Deterville—honour would suggest to you, that your first care ought to be the reputation of his wife, and that her future peace should be far more dear to you than the selfish gratification of your own passion. What reparation can you make to her family for dishonouring its brightest ornament? What atonement to herself, for seducing her from the path of rectitude—for staining the purity of her spotless fame—for planting for ever in her heart the poisoned dagger of remorse? Oh, my brother! what equivalent can you offer to my dear misguided Isabella for the loss of her own esteem and that of the world?”

“No more, Virginia, I beseech you;  
if



if my rebellious spirit refused to yield to the gentle admonitions of the worthy Herbert, it shall never be said that I was subdued by my sister's womanly fears. Go, go, Virginia; the dinner-bell has rung twice: go, and let our conference be secret as the grave. To-night you will see the countess; be careful not to betray to her my confidence."

A servant now came to announce that dinner was on table, and though neither lord de Morville nor his sister felt any inclination to eat, yet out of compliment to Mrs. Meredith and her niece, they hastened to join them in the dining-parlour, each endeavouring to assume an air of cheerfulness, that the real state of their feelings might be concealed from their friends, whose good-natured inquiries and affectionate fears would only, at that moment, have contributed to increase their embarrassment and add to their distress.

END OF VOL. III.









